

Are young climate activists finally being heard? Research shows adults support youth voice to parliament

August 1 2024, by Louise Phillips, Francisco Perales and Jenny Ritchie



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

In recent years, the climate emergency has sparked a global response from children and young people. The School Strikes for Climate

movement is a prominent example.

Through this activism, [children](#) express their frustration at [political systems](#) that exclude their voices. This situation is particularly important because children will bear the brunt of future climate catastrophes.

It seems their message might be getting through. Our [recent research](#) demonstrates that adults in Australia and New Zealand generally [support](#) children being heard in government decisions about the environment.

So what has prompted this support, and how can it be turned into action?

Our study

Despite ongoing political debate about whether and how children's voices should be incorporated in environmental decisions, we know surprisingly little about general public attitudes.

To address this, we added a question to national surveys in both New Zealand and Australia as part of the 2020 [International Social Survey Program](#). The surveys included roughly 1,000 respondents each, and sampling weights were applied for the results to be nationally representative.

We asked how strongly respondents support children and [young people's](#) views being included in government decision-making about the environment. The question was asked in relation to four different age groups: 3–5-year-olds, 6–10-year-olds, 11–14-year-olds and 15–18-year-olds.

What we found

We found a majority of surveyed adults in both countries support 11–14 year-olds (62% in Australia and 59% in New Zealand) and 15–18 year-olds (79% in Australia and 80% in New Zealand) having opportunities to influence government decisions on the environment.

Our analyses also revealed that various population groups agreed more than others to children's voices being included in environmental decisions. For example, across all child age groups, women were consistently more likely than men to express support.

Historically, women have felt the brunt of exclusion from political participation, while also being key in nurturing children via mothering and teaching roles. This context may mean greater respect and empathy from women and therefore greater support for children's views being heard.

Green party voters, members of environmental organizations and 18–30 year-olds were also more likely than other population groups to support children's views being included.

Attempts to be heard

Our finding of a high degree of public support for young people being heard aligns with lobbying to lower the voting age to 16 in both countries.

Young people in Australia launched the ["Make it 16" campaign](#) in June 2023. In New Zealand, the current National-led coalition government recently [rejected steps](#) to progress legislation to extend the voting age. This had been introduced by the previous government in response to a successful Supreme Court case taken by the New Zealand Make it 16 campaign to [legislate to extend the voting age](#).

Rejecting this ruling is an undemocratic breach of human rights, as outlined in the United Nations [Convention](#) on the Rights of the Child.

The UN [published a "comment"](#) in response to children's calls for action. It clearly outlines what governments must do. It states that governments must ensure that children's views are heard at all stages of environmental decision-making processes. This applies to decisions being made at the local, national and international level.

Winds of change

Our findings indicate the public in Australia and New Zealand is responsive to calls for greater involvement of children in environmental decision-making.

Indeed, our results reflect greater levels of public support than those observed in earlier [research](#) study focused on a broader question seeking adult views on children and young people's involvement in government decision-making.

School climate strikes may be having a positive influence on adult attitudes towards including children in the political sphere. Media coverage of young people being [politicallyactive](#) could also be shifting adults' beliefs on young people's political engagement.

In other words, the more adults hear and see stories of children and young people's concerns and restorative actions for the environment, the greater potential there is for adults to understand and support their perspectives.

The way forward

How can we move towards greater consideration of children's views in government decisions regarding the environment? There are some foundational courses of actions that could be pursued.

Members of parliament could do this by listening to children and youth in their electorates. Early childhood education centers, schools and arts, cultural and sports centers can support MPs' access to child and youth forums.

Further, youth parliamentary programs such as the [YMCA program](#) could be officially embedded in the Australian parliamentary system. This would ensure that bills that youth table are heard and voted on. Similarly, the parliamentary system in New Zealand could take more heed of the triennial [Youth Parliament](#).

Children and young people deserve to have their concerns heard and influence policies that will greatly impact their future lives—well beyond those of current politicians.

More information: Louise Gwenneth Phillips et al, Surveying adult support for child and youth voice on environmental governmental decision-making in Australian and New Zealand, *Geoforum* (2024). [DOI: 10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.104072](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2024.104072)

This article is republished from [The Conversation](#) under a Creative Commons license. Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Are young climate activists finally being heard? Research shows adults support youth voice to parliament (2024, August 1) retrieved 1 August 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2024-08-young-climate-activists-heard-adults.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.