



Consolidated reply of the e-Discussion on

Youth Political Participation

Co-convended with UNDP4YOUTH

June 2017



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*



LAUNCHING MESSAGE

Young people are often excluded or overlooked as political candidates. Politics is typically regarded as a space for politically experienced men, and while women are often disadvantaged in accumulating experience to run for office, young people are systematically marginalized because of their young age, limited opportunities, and projected lack of experience. As the increased political participation of women benefits society as a whole, the presence of young people in decision-making positions benefits all citizens and not just youth. In its Report on [Youth participation in national parliaments 2016](#), the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) reports that people between the ages of 20 and 44 make up 57% of the world's voting age population but only 26% of the world's Members of Parliament (MPs). Young people under 30 represent 1.9% of the world's MPs and more than 80% of the world's upper houses of Parliament have no MPs aged under 30. While young people often play central and catalyzing roles in movements for democracy around the world, they are less engaged than older generations in voting and party activism. Together, these trends have inspired many international organizations to study the lack of youth political participation and train youth activists to become political leaders.

Recognizing the potential of youth, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) developed its first-ever [Youth Strategy \(2014–2017\)](#), called “Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future”, in line with the [UN System-Wide Action Plan on Youth](#) (2013) which calls on young generations to become more involved and more committed in development processes. 2013 also saw the publication of the [“Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle: A Good Practice Guide”](#), UNDP's first review of programming strategies for youth political participation beyond the ballot box. In 2016, to further boost the implementation of UNDP's Youth Strategy and respond to both the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and [United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on youth, peace and security](#), UNDP launched a [Youth Global Programme for Sustainable Development and Peace – Youth-GPS \(2016–2020\)](#). The Youth-GPS focuses on civic engagement and political participation, among other areas, and responds to the concerns young people have expressed in global, regional and national forums and the growing demand at all levels for cutting-edge and strategic support in youth programming in all development contexts. In 2016, as a joint initiative of a number of partners including UNDP and IPU, the [“Not Too Young To Run”](#) global campaign was launched to elevate the promotion of young people's right to run for public office and address the wide-spread issue of age discrimination.

In 2010, IPU adopted the resolution [“Youth participation in the democratic process”](#) at its 122nd Assembly and in 2013, established the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. Since then, IPU published two studies, one in [2014](#) and another in [2016](#), using a questionnaire to gather data from its Member Parliaments around the world on youth participation in national parliaments. Through these studies, IPU provides a number of recommendations for action which, if acted on, will ensure young people are fully engaged in politics. These include designing strategies by national parliaments and political parties that target the inclusion of young MPs and ensure diversity among youth, addressing the disparities between the number of young men and young women entering parliament. IPU also recommends to align the minimum age for parliamentary candidacies with the minimum voting age and to establish youth quotas (e.g. reserved seats, legislated quotas, party quotas) as a means of increasing the number of young MPs. In 2016 the IPU membership endorsed the document [“Rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth”](#), based on the principles promoted by the young parliamentarians of the IPU: “No decisions about us without us”, that outlines how parliaments and parliamentarians could help rejuvenate democracy and give the world's young people a voice in political decision-making.

In addition, UN Women established the [Youth Forum at the CSW](#) in March 2016, allowing global youth representatives to discuss the issues they face and to reflect on ways to help deliver on the [Sustainable Development Goals](#), especially Goal 5 on gender equality. UN Women also published [CEDAW for Youth](#) in 2016, a youth-friendly version of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) elaborated by young people. International IDEA published in 2016 a report entitled [“Increasing youth participation throughout the electoral cycle: entry points for electoral management bodies”](#) documenting the challenges and practices directed at youth inclusion in politics and within different electoral processes.

Objective of the e-Discussion

This e-Discussion seeks to bring the voices of the iKNOW Politics and [UNDP4Youth](#) communities into this growing debate on youth participation in politics. Please join the e-Discussion from **03 April to 08 May 2017**. Students, young parliamentarians, political party and social movement activists, civil society representatives, youth movements and networks, government and international organizations representatives, and academia are invited to contribute with their experiences by answering to one or more of the below questions. The submissions will contribute to the elaboration of a Consolidated Reply that will augment the knowledge base available on the topic of youth political participation. We look to an informative knowledge-sharing exercise on this topic.

Questions

1. How do you explain the low representation of young people in parliaments and governments around the world?
2. What is an enabling environment for young people’s participation in politics, in particular young women?
3. What can parliaments, governments, political parties, and civil society do to increase young women and men’s representation in politics? Do you have examples of good practices?
4. What are some of the most innovative alternative methods (marches, sit-ins...) to formal political participation that young people choose to bring about change and be heard?
5. How can we support more young people who would be interested in channeling their activism through formal political institutions?
6. What strategies and approaches have been successful in recruiting young men and women in political parties?
7. What can be done to support young MPs in their parliamentary career? Please share any initiatives you are aware of.
8. How can young parliamentarians better address gender equality and women’s empowerment? Are youth more likely to be active in combatting discrimination and gender based violence?
9. How can we best measure youth political participation and policy influence?

CONTRIBUTIONS

From 3 April to 8 May 2017, iKNOW Politics hosted an e-Discussion in collaboration with UNDP4YOUTH on [Youth Political Participation](#). Fifteen participants from Sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab region, the Americas, and Europe engaged in the online debate and submitted contributions. The e-Discussion gathered twelve contributions in English, one in Arabic, one in French, and one in Spanish. Comprising of experts, members of civil society organizations, students, and representatives of government institutions,

the participants commonly stressed the urgent need for action to give young people the opportunity and power to influence policies that affect their lives by introducing measures aimed at increasing their interest and participation in politics. More details about the experts and their contributions are provided below:

1. [Agripinner Nandhego](#), Programme Specialist Political Participation and Leadership, UN Women Uganda
2. [Annet Mpabulungi Wakabi](#), Team Leader Governance, UNDP Uganda
3. [Asha Shidane](#), Procurement Associate, UNDP Somalia
4. [Ayaba Jana Shodiya](#), Programme Director of WENG, UK/Nigeria
5. [Carmen Tripi Laynes](#), Officer at the Congress of the Republic of Peru, Peru
6. [Esther Assiene Ndeme](#), graduate student at the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon and President of the Diplomatic Students and Interns Association of the same institute, Cameroon
7. [Hanane Saouli](#), journalist, Algeria
8. [Ibrahim Okinda](#), PhD in Communication and Media Technology Candidate, Moi University, Kenya
9. [iKNOW Politics user, anonymous](#)
10. [iKNOW Politics user 'Bachia2017'](#)
11. [Mercy Idika](#), PhD student in Public Policy and Administration at Walden University in Minneapolis, USA/Nigeria
12. [Nili Majumder](#), Online Advocacy Officer for the Global Fund for Women's Initiatives, India
13. [Saad Al Rawi](#), Electoral Adviser to political entities in Iraq, former Vice President of the Council of the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq, Iraq
14. [Sara Edward](#), Egypt
15. [Zeina Hilal](#), Youth participation programme, IPU, Switzerland

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The iKNOW Politics and UNDP4YOUTH teams would like to extend their thanks to all their members and followers who took the time to answer the questions of this e-Discussion and share experiences, practices, and recommendations. The contributions are summarized below.

1. How do you explain the low representation of young people in parliaments and governments around the world?

There is strong agreement among participants that democracy is incomplete without the equal and full participation of everyone, especially women and youth. Participants argue that political institutions around the world are in desperate need for greater youth participation and engagement. A representative of the Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) points to IPU's research and [report](#) on youth participation in national parliaments 2016 which shows the low representation on young people in world parliaments:

- About 30 per cent of the world's single and lower houses of parliament have no MPs aged under 30.
- More than 80 per cent of the world's upper houses of parliament have no MPs aged under 30.
- Not a single upper house of parliament anywhere in the world has more than 10 per cent of its members aged under 30.

Pointing to some encouraging signs, IPU's research finds that the gender imbalance is less pronounced among younger MPs, where the male/female ratio is 60:40.

A UN Women **Uganda** representative presents the following factors that could explain the poor representation of youth in political institutions:

- **Minimal investment in young people to take on representative roles:** Young people are rarely nurtured to debate, present, and deliberate on current issues, so in most cases they are left behind.
- **Lack of knowledge and awareness about roles:** Young people are sometimes unaware of what a representative/political career would entail.
- **Gender power relations:** The older generations are often not interested to see young ones in their space so they tend to lock this space. Further, the space for young women to participate is hampered by the patriarchal nurture, both at household level and externally.
- **Financial limitation:** Young people do not have the resources to engage actively in a context that has monetized politics. Without financial means, 'muscle' it becomes difficult to draw attention and votes.

Many participants explain the low representation of young people in parliaments and governments to the fact that older generations have continued to over shadow youth's involvement in political activities by not actively seeking to put in place provisions and mechanisms to promote the renewal of political parties and institutions and the engagement of young people.

It is also agreed that one of the main factors hindering political participation among the youth is the lack of quality civic and political education. For example, a participant from **Peru** argues that few resources are allocated to political and civic education for children and teenagers, leading many to be uninformed about their countries' political systems and main political parties. According to her, this explains in part the lack of young people's engagement in elections as voters and hence why established politicians do not make the effort to engage younger generations, compared to other voting groups towards which they are more likely to invest their outreach efforts. Furthermore, it is argued that given the high emphasis politicians and candidates put on their experience and political knowledge, young people may be led to believe they have nothing to contribute to society as decision-makers.

A university student from **Cameroon** focused one of her research projects on youth political participation and found through her survey that 80% of Cameroonian students practice 'passive politics', meaning that they actively follow political events, especially during presidential elections, during which they follow candidates on social media, go to meetings, and watch debates. However, this passive activism does not always translate into formal political engagement and commitment from young people. Most students surveyed conveyed their desire to join politics once they reached their forties and once they have accumulated enough experience.

An elections expert from **Iraq** explains the low youth political participation to the lack of a democratic culture in some Arab countries. He believes young people tend to steer clear from running for elections mainly because they do not trust the political system to be transparent enough to give them a fair environment to run against well-established politicians. He also points out to the shared responsibility of political parties and parliaments in failing to change this perception of politics. For example, he reports

that currently the Iraqi Parliament is debating the minimum age for candidates and whether candidates should be at least 25 or 30 years old to run for office. He argues that tendencies show the Parliament will likely opt for the 30 years old limit, which according to him fails to send a message of inclusion to the Iraqi youth.

2. What is an enabling environment for young people's participation in politics, in particular young women?

Many participants agree it is essential that schools and universities focus on civic education and programmes such as debating clubs and student councils that would nurture political representation and leadership ambitions at the early stages of life. For example, participants from **Uganda, Nigeria, Somalia** and the **UK** argue that engaging young people in schools on societal issues would familiarize them with political activism and groom them for future leadership roles.

It is also widely agreed that young people, especially young women, can greatly benefit from role models with which they can identify. This would give valuable exposure and first-hand leadership experience as well as a port of entry to an otherwise closed network. A participant from **Kenya** also mentions the media's responsibility in showcasing young men and women leaders' achievements so that other young people could be inspired.

A contributor from **Iraq** argues that political violence plays a big role in scaring young people away from getting involved in politics. An enabling environment for young men and women's participation in politics is one that is free of psychological and physical violence.

Particular to young women in politics, there is a strong agreement that young women suffer from double discrimination: gender and age. While all young people are kept away from getting involved in politics because of their lack of experience, young women face another set of constraints related to gender perceptions and discrimination. It is thus suggested that schools and parents must specifically support young women and girls in order to give them the space and confidence they need to become leaders. Particular emphasis is put on the need to stop violence against women in politics, which participants consider as a major obstacle to young women's interest and participation in politics.

3. What can parliaments, governments, political parties, and civil society do to increase young women and men's representation in politics? Do you have examples of good practices?

IPU's research suggest that new technologies and online tools are helping citizens, including young people, to understand and monitor the work of parliaments. This also boosts accessibility and transparency. Participants also suggest that youth quotas, lower eligibility ages, proportional representation and inclusive parliaments are all factors that increase the number of young parliamentarians.

Other strategies to engage young people in politics are Youth Parliaments, which exist in half the countries surveyed in IPU's study. Some Youth Parliaments have formal ties to national parliament but most are coordinated by non-governmental organizations, government ministries, schools or other local authorities.

In **Uganda**, young people are encouraged to participate in politics through policy that calls for regional representation. All four regions of the country have to elect a youth representative and one national

female youth representative bringing the total to five youth representatives. Currently, there are two female and three male youth MPs.

The youth MPs in Uganda also have a Youth Parliamentary Forum where they discuss issues affecting young people and come up with strategies to address them in the legislative process. Many civil society organizations and development agencies offer capacity building opportunities through this forum. For example, UN Women and other development partners support mentoring programs for young people specifically to enhance their skills in leadership and understanding politics.

A participant from UNDP Uganda showcases other good practices from Uganda such as the [National Youth Council](#) and the National Youth Policy, which are key precursors for creating an enabling environment for young people to reach their potential.

In many countries, political parties recruit students as interns or entry-level staffers in the party. With this approach, not only are party ideals and skills inculcated at an early age but also, young talent is more easily detected and retained.

In the **UK** for example, the Parliament set up outreach agendas in schools, youth centers and communities. These are run by the Parliament and are targeted at youth in general to encourage them, to show them that their voice can be heard, and to give them a chance to participate.

4. What are some of the most innovative alternative methods (marches, sit-ins...) to formal political participation that young people choose to bring about change and be heard?

There is a strong agreement among participants that there are a number of ways young people can follow to make their voices heard and bring about change to issues they care about. For example, it is argued that mobilizing youth through sports and popular arts and cultural manifestations such as music and drama can have positive effects on young people's engagement in political issues.

Most innovative alternative methods mentioned are related to new technologies. For instance, participants point out to innovative platforms such as the parliamentary outreach support by UNDP in Uganda and **Australia's** [vote flux](#) that bridges the gap between Parliament and the public. They also suggest greater use of the internet and mobile phones to create networks and leadership communities that can easily and widely exchange ideas, knowledge, and experiences. Initiatives like these should be encouraged to increase the space for youth participation.

More specifically, there is a consensus in the e-Discussion around the idea that social media has profoundly changed political activism. Recognizing the magnifying power of social media, from their side, political actors have made social media platforms an integral part of their electoral campaigns and given that young people are social media's main users, this is an innovative way to get their attention and implicate them in political discussions and events. In addition to this passive consumption of social media, young people are also active users as they are increasingly using social media platforms to express their discontent with certain policy orientations, to express their own political views, and also to mobilize around issues of interest.

5. How can we support more young people who would be interested in channeling their activism through formal political institutions?

Participants widely agree that more space should be given to young people to express their needs and aspirations for the future. Meaningful investment in youth councils is suggested as one possible solution to giving the youth the space to voice their concerns. Some participants suggest that making the internet more accessible and affordable would increase information and knowledge sharing among the youth. Others propose leadership trainings and mentorship programmes as effective ways to equip the youth with the skills and knowledge needed to get involved in politics.

Furthermore, contributors point out that most young people's concern is securing a financially stable future for themselves. In this regard, it is suggested that financial empowerment is key to supporting young people at this stage of their lives. Scholarships, grants, or internship opportunities could serve as incentives for young people to join political institutions. This is particularly important for young people who might be interested in running for office and that for lack of financial means to run a campaign, find themselves unable to compete on equal grounds with older candidates. For this, political will is crucial.

6. What strategies and approaches have been successful in recruiting young men and women in political parties?

It is argued that youth participation in politics correlates with the opportunities young people are offered. Initiatives such as mock Parliaments, youth forums, debates, and political discussions specific to young people could help develop their interest in public affairs and their leadership skills. Leadership programmes such as the Africa-wide [YALI](#) (African Young Leaders Initiative) are cited as good practices that could be replicated on the national level to spark interest among the youth.

Specific to political parties, active youth wings of political parties such as the ANC in **South Africa** were identified as effective platforms to recruit young people in formal political institutions and processes. Similarly, youth quotas, which can entail reserving seats for young people in parliament or requiring that parties nominate a certain percentage of young candidates, were also mentioned as effective ways of increasing the proportion of young elected politicians. According to [IPU's study](#), this tool is used only rarely to support youth participation.

Furthermore, participants suggest that political parties should showcase existing young politicians in order to attract more youth. Arguing that one cannot be what one cannot see, this can have a great effect of young people who are used to believe that politics is not a space for youth.

7. What can be done to support young MPs in their parliamentary career? Please share any initiatives you are aware of.

In addition to electing young parliamentarians, another way to support youth participation involves empowering young MPs with knowledge and tools in bringing youth perspectives to public policy formulation. To do this, in addition to offering an orientation specifically designed for young MPs to learn about their responsibilities and a mentorship programme with well-experienced MPs, a contributor from **Uganda** suggests that Parliament research departments should play a bigger role and need to be strengthened to deliver knowledge and evidence for MPs to use in their policy work. Young parliamentarians also need to be systematically exposed to national and global issues and involved in discussing them.

Establishing networks of young parliamentarians is also suggested as an effective way to create connections that can facilitate legislative work and empower young MPs. It can also involve forming a legislative caucus on youth or participating in a committee dedicated to youth issues.

8. How can young parliamentarians better address gender equality and women's empowerment? Are youth more likely to be active in combatting discrimination and gender based violence?

A student from the **United States of America** asserts that, thanks to new technologies and social media, young people are well-equipped to mitigate gender inequality and discrimination. Social media allows the youth to widely expose gender inequality issues, to raise awareness, and to advocate for greater gender equality. Particular to young MPs, participants recommend they promote women's political participation by supporting women candidates during elections and actively contributing to the elaboration of women-friendly policies.

9. How can we best measure youth political participation and policy influence?

Beyond measuring the numbers of young elected representatives and voters, participants argue that monitoring the policy outcomes is key to measuring the extent of young MPs' influence on policy decision-making. This is done by monitoring the contributions of young MPs to parliamentary debates and discussions as well as monitoring their propositions' impacts on final policy decisions, especially those affecting the youth.