

Committee: Young Delegates Forum

Issue: Encouraging the youth's participation in politics

Student Officer: Ioanna Flessa

Position: President

INTRODUCTION

Dear delegates,

My name is Ioanna Flessa and I am honored to serve as the President of the Young Delegates Forum during this year's 4th ATS MUN. I am sixteen years old and I attend the 11th grade in Arsakeia Schools of Patras. Altogether, I've participated in four MUN conferences as a delegate and this is going to be my first time as a Student Officer.

MUN is one of the most amazing experiences I've ever had. Every conference taught me something new about the world and myself. Through these conferences you will be able to overcome your fear of public speaking, learn how to deal with others, become more confident and establish new friendships.

This year's second topic is about youth's participation in politics, which is a complex and vast issue that needs to be discussed and finally solved. This study provides you with a very good starting point for your research. However, it's significant that you do your own research as well, regarding your country's policy. Despite the fact that the YDF has its own agenda items and simplified rules of procedure, you will still be representing countries in a formal MUN style debate.

Should you have any question on the topic or the conference in general, feel free to contact me via email (iwannaflessa@gmail.com). I hope that this experience will be as much special and enlightening as it is for me and I am looking forward to meeting and working with you at the conference!

Kind regards,

Ioanna Flessa, President of the Young Delegates Forum

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Politics

Politics, in its broadest sense, is the activity through which people make, preserve and amend the general rules under which they live. It is exciting because people disagree about how they should live, how power and other resources should be distributed and so on. Politics, above all, is a social activity, which means that is always a dialogue, and never a monologue. Thus, politics is inextricably linked to the phenomena of cooperation and conflict. On the one hand, the existence of rival opinions, different wishes, competing needs and opposing interests

guarantees disagreement about the rules under which people live. On the other hand, people recognize that, in order to influence these rules or ensure that they are upheld, they are obliged to work with others.

(https://www.macmillanihe.com/resources/sample-chapters/9780230363373_sample.pdf)

Elections

Elections are commonly understood as the processes of voting for public office or public policy but they also are used to choose leaders and to settle policy questions in private organizations, such as corporations, labor unions, and religious groups. They also take place within specific government bodies. In elections, a candidate is a person who is selected by others as a contestant. A ballot is anything that a voter uses to express their choice, such as paper and pen or a lever or a machine. A poll is the place where a voter casts their ballot.

(<https://legal-dictionary.thefreedictionary.com/Elections>)

Parliament

The legislative body of the government, which represents the electorate, makes laws and oversees the work of the government.

Electorate

People who are eligible to vote in an election.

Referendum

A special voting occasion only for crucial state matters.

Demonstration

Demonstration or protest is referred to as a mass group or a collection of groups that advocate or condemn a cause, a perception or a political law.

Demagogue

A person who takes advantage of the electorate's prejudices and ignorance so as to gain political leverage. This person is usually known for his high competency in public speaking.

Minister

A member of the current government in charge of a specific policy manner (interior, finance, agriculture, education etc)

Millennials

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, are born between 1977 and 2000 (aged between 18 and 40) and they make up 25% of the US population and they do not vote.

Acronyms

UN: United Nations

MP: Member of Parliament

EU: European Union

NGO: Non-governmental organization

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

NDI: National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

CSO: Civil society organization

EMB: Electoral management body

IPU: Inter-Parliamentary Union

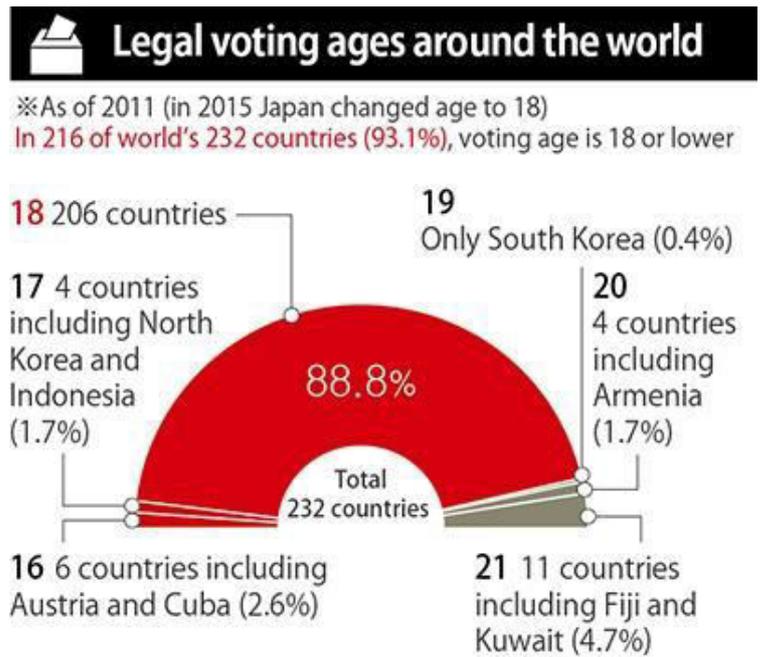
AYLG: Asia Young Leaders for Governance

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Youth's participation in politics is considered as one of the most complex and debatable issues of our era. Nowadays, when it comes to political affairs, everyone seems to have an opinion, regardless of their religion, cultural background, and level of education or age. Even though political participation is a fundamental democratic right, youths do not participate in formal politics due to preconceived attitudes such as the fear that their vote does not have an overall changing effect. Politics is typically regarded as a field suitable only for politically experienced men (above 50) and women are often disadvantaged because of their sex prejudices, whereas young people are marginalized because of their young age, limited opportunities and projected lack of experience. As the increased political participation of women benefits the society, the same logic applies to the presence of young people in decision-making positions because is not only important for the statistics, but also for the society as a whole. People under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions and according to the UN Youth, young people between the ages of 15 and 25 constitute a fifth of the world's population, statistical facts that are worrying by themselves.

In most countries, the voting age is 18 years at the national level. The following countries have different age minimums:

16 years: Argentina, Austria



Why youth participation?

The ancient philosopher Aristotle said: “Man is by nature a political animal.” By etymology participation roots in the Latin “participare” which itself is a combination of the noun “pars” and the verb “capare”, which means to take part or attend something. It could be concluded that participation is a reaction to be an active part of something.

Participation is a fundamental democratic right. This fact alone should be capable of removing any existing barriers in youth political participation. A survey has indicated that in emerging democracies the inclusion of the youth in the formal political sphere is important from the very start. Young and educated people have innovative perspectives and a host of pioneering ideas that can develop and change a country for the better. They have undoubtedly participated, contributed and even catalyzed important alterations in political systems, power-sharing dynamics and economic opportunities. Young students are more suitable than the old ones because they are more generous, large-hearted, forgiving and submissive, while old people can be selfish, materialistic, revengeful and narrow-minded.

If they did not engage with politics, there would be many issues concerning the political establishments as far as future generations go. In dictatorship regimes, protests led by young people can force autocratic leaders to step down from power, allowing them to participate in democratic decision-making. The youth is the future. The new generation can see the mistakes that the current politicians make and that will help them to improve themselves by not repeating them. By watching other politicians’ mistakes, youngsters can transform themselves into successful political leaders.

Countries desperately need youngsters, who possess energy, enthusiasm, a high morality code and diligence. Youngsters are not only people in their 20's with no experience, but also people in their 30's and 40's with lots of energy and enthusiasm, combined with sufficient experience. That does not necessarily mean that every old politician should step down from their office, on the grounds that their experience is crucial in the decision-making process.

Moreover, the youth faces many issues in the world that remain unaddressed most of the times. Young people would better understand people of their same age and they would go out of their way to change the world by raising awareness, creating new opportunities, adopting ground-breaking policies and in short, promoting a new mindset, a one that talks more directly to their anxieties as well as their deepest dreams. Active participation of the youth can act as a catalyst to combat erosive practices of the present, such as inequality, discrimination, crime, corruption and nepotism that are still prevalent in our political system.

Furthermore, they can play a key role in rebuilding lives and communities and establishing more peaceful societies by preventing conflicts in multicultural environments with often conflicting interests. Young people who learn from an early stage to assimilate principal democratic and human values will later be able to integrate smoothly into the adult society and refresh the international agenda.

It is widely believed that young people want to be part of the conversation, they are more curious and concerned about the future than many adults, they know that lies are morally wrong and tend to lead to conflicts, most of them do not let differences divide them, they learn something new every day, they have flying-high aspirations, they want to discover and improve the world, they expect honesty and can handle the bold truth. Since they are the ones to rule the world in the next few years, they are perceived as the most suitable candidates to accomplish this mission.

Why do young people not participate in politics?

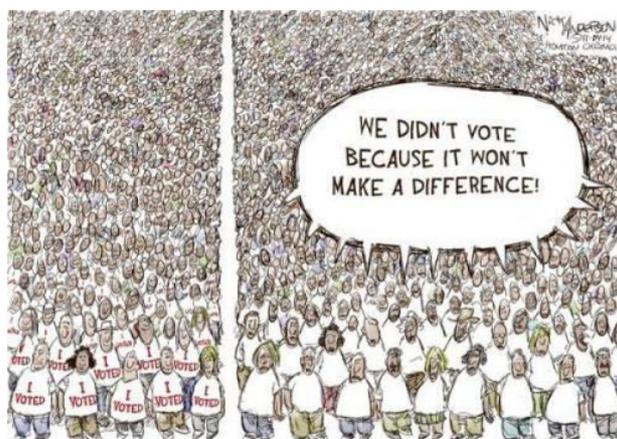
By hearing the word politics the first thought that comes to someone's mind is corruption. We often associate politics with scandals and behind-closed door meetings. But does this image fully depict the reality? Politics, as a principle, is far away from such things, it is just the actions of those in power that taint the notion of participation. Young people claim that the political system is corrupt and they do not want to be involved at all. Interest in conventional political participation (such as voting in elections) has declined over the recent years and young people have gradually cut ties with politics whatsoever. They develop a growing sense of dissent because they think that the political establishment has betrayed their ideas, concerns and the principles of democracy in general.

Another key reason why young people are more and more absent from voting polls is the relaxation of penalties in case someone does not show up on the voting day. It used to be the case that participation was mandatory and the failure to meet this duty brought harsh implications for the person. Nowadays, although participation is still

necessary, punishments are seldom imposed to the offenders, thus it is common for the youth to abstain from the voting process. Moreover, more countries pass legislation so that people from an earlier age (16 or 17) can formally vote. That turns out to be a double-edge knife policy, however, since the necessary political education has to precede it, otherwise it may have a negative effect on the willingness of the youth to participate again.

Young people are often characterized as immature, reckless and sometimes naive when it comes to their political opinion. It is commonly believed that young people have a wild imagination and despite the fact that their ideas are avant-garde, they can be non-functional and very difficult to be accomplished.

Except for the fact that in most countries underage people are not allowed to vote, in some other countries like America, even if they are allowed to vote, they choose not to. Millennials do not vote because they believe that their vote will not make any difference and they stand by the belief that if they wanted to vote they would. They believe that the engagement in politics is a personal choice, not an obligation. That does not mean necessarily that they do not care. It is actually the opposite. Millennials do care deeply, however, about helping contributing in a greater cause, such as the general good. It should be stated, however, that by believing their vote cannot be a solid reason for foreseeable political change, many young people with cynical views about politics are accumulated, added to the already large pile of conservative adult voters. The end result is nothing but optimistic.



MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Nigeria

A Nigerian Youth Agenda on Political Participation with the Nigerian Youth Inter Party Forum is being developed after the 2015 elections. This forum will be used by young delegates in order for issues of common interest to be discussed and also for the frontiers for the youth's participation in politics to be broadened.

Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan Youth Parliament has 335 members. Twice a month, youth parliamentarians meet in the capital and debate relevant issues and also enter the committees of the national Parliament and consult national members. Youth are included in national decision-making in a fairly representative way.

India (Rajasthan)

In 1993, children expressed their desire to know more about governance and came up with the idea for a children's parliament. By 2004, the fifth children's parliament was in session and 4,000 children have elected 56 members and a prime minister. The minimum age to participate is 11 years. Its members have the power to fire teachers who fail in their duties, following an investigation based on the formal lodging of a complaint. They attend village education committee meetings and take up matters with local officials.

Kenya

Young participants from different political parties receive skills training, primarily on negotiation and advocacy, and develop projects to implement within the parties. The Inter-Party Youth Forum hosted a conference with over 500 youth from different ethnic, religious and political allegiances. In September 2010 leaders from Kenya's seven leading political parties attended, and television and radio stations broadcasted the conference across the country.

Cambodia

After two important elections in 2012 and 2013, UNDP Cambodia is implementing a national youth civic education campaign. The youth participate in a Campaign Working Group, which provides technical advice. The project seeks to reach 5 million young people in order to create a competent, empowered and enfranchised constituency of the youth. This will raise awareness regarding the value of the youth's participation among older people.

Jordan

UNDP has trained a core group of 15 young trainers and piloted two debate training programs as part of its youth program with the Ministry of Political Development (MoPD) to increase youth participation. The 'Youth Participation in Local Governance' project has sponsored an innovation camp for the youth, with features mock elections, interactive training on public speaking, the use of social media for personal progress and other skills.

Australia

The Australian Electoral Commission conducts various activities to ensure that young and first-time voters are enrolled to vote and keep their enrollment details valid. Voting and enrolling are compulsory for every Australian citizen over 18 years of age.

Yemen

The government of Yemen works with youth in tribal settings, combines training with results-oriented practice and participation, enables youth to participate in community decision-making. The youth have successfully influenced community leaders and processes.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

- ✓ In 2011, the UNDP Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund issued a call for proposals from UNPD Country Offices in support of innovative and catalytic projects on youth to inform public policy-making, training youth as effective leaders, extending access to justice, opening space for youth empowerment and democratic governance. 37 proposals were accepted, out of which 9 are in Africa, 8 in the Arab States, 5 in Asia and the Pacific, 8 in Central and Eastern Europe/ Commonwealth of Independent States and 7 in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- ✓ Resolution 64/134 of 18 December 2009, the General Assembly decided to organize a world youth conference.
- ✓ Resolution 65/267 of 15 March 2011, the General Assembly that the world youth conference should take the form of a High-level Meeting of the General Assembly at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

- ✓ The “World Programme of Action for Youth for 2000 and beyond” touched upon the importance of youth participation in decision-making, but didn’t offer concrete interventions at the time.
- ✓ The UNDP Regional Service Centre in Bangkok implemented the Asia Young Leaders for Governance (AYLG) initiative over the period 2005-2009. The training courses involved young leaders working in government or areas of leadership in good governance and were between the ages of 25-35 years. The program was highly successful with stakeholders and beneficiaries requesting continuation.
- ✓ The European Governance White Paper (2001) considers youth participation as one of its five principles ensuring that young people are consulted and more involved in the decisions which concern them.
- ✓ The Article 165 of the Lisbon Treaty (2009) states that one of the aims of EU action should be focused towards encouraging the participation of young people in democratic life in Europe.
- ✓ Youth’s participation in the Council of Europe:

The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers in its Resolution (98) 6 on the Youth Policy of the Council of Europe (1998) stated that ‘to encourage young people’s participation in civil society was among the policy objectives and stipulated that the encouragement of new forms of youth participation and organization was one of its priorities’.

- ✓ Youth’s participation in the European Union:

In 2001, the European Commission issued the White Paper entitled “A New Impetus for European Youth”, representing a new framework for European cooperation and the first step in setting up a coherent youth policy framework in the European Union. The document identifies youth participation as one of areas where the EU member states were invited to co-ordinate their policies in the youth field. The document was prompted by the worry that there was a ‘democratic deficit in the EU’ and that young people were among those most affected (Davies, 2009).

In 2009, the Commission presented a Communication entitled “an EU Strategy for Youth-Investing and Empowering- A renewed open method of coordination to address youth challenges and opportunities (2010-2018).The EU Youth Strategy is based on a renewed open method of coordination, acknowledging that young people have a crucial role to play in meeting the many socio-economic, demographic, cultural, environmental and technological challenges and opportunities facing EU.

The objective of the Commission in terms of youth participation is to:

‘Ensure full participation of youth in society by increasing youth participation in the civic life of local communities and in representative democracy by supporting youth organizations as well as various forms of ‘learning to participate’, by encouraging participation of non-organized young people and by providing quality information services. (European Commission, 2009)

A notable institution is the European Youth Parliament, which is an accurate simulation of the actual proceedings of the European Parliament. It takes place on an annual basis and through this, young people can voice their concerns, exchange opinions and come up with feasible solutions to problems that concern the everyday European reality.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Ways to encourage young people’s participation into politics:

1. The alteration of the current law which will institute that the voting age to be lowered to 16 years. Young people will be encouraged to debate their issues with their peers and reach conclusions that will be taken into consideration by the government.
2. By developing a youth agency, which will encourage young people’s unique ideas and motivations for political engagement, while improving their knowledge of political organizing, specific skills and behaviors that enable political participation. An agency that will use a range of relevant activities to integrate participants in discussion about democracy, their role as active citizens and educate them about the voting procedure.

3. Schools should compose a lesson, especially for current political actions, in order to keep the students cognizant of the ongoing incidents. Students will be able to study in depth the history of politics and have a thorough knowledge of the capabilities of each potential political leader. By having encyclopedic knowledge of the total status, they will be capable of deciding and voting for the most suitable candidate for the position. An in-depth study of the basic ideas of famous political philosophers will also be a milestone in the endeavour to raise political interest.
4. By fostering an enabling environment for the youth participation. That requires the recognition of the structural inequities that degrade young people based on their gender or other characteristics, and the concession of spaces to youth to interact and build relationships with people of their age.
5. Young people should interact with successful adult leaders frequently so that to become familiar with issues that the public faces and pay attention on how trained and experienced politicians deal and solve them.
6. By changing the voting procedure completely. More precisely, the elections will have the form of a quiz, in which the names of the candidates will be hidden so that the elections can be impartial. Candidate profiles could be structured by the local voting authorities. Instead of the ballot boxes, people will stand in front of a screen which will display the capabilities of each candidate. In that way voters can choose the most qualified person for the position without being prejudiced. This is a procedure that allows young people to vote basing on facts and not rumors. That will also scale back older people's concerns that young people are incapable of separating real promises or features from the fake ones.
7. Young people should fight for their rights. They have the right to participate in politics. They should demonstrate against those who refuse to accept the fact that they have a say when it comes to political decisions. They should fight for what they want and not let anyone take it from them.
8. Grown-ups should talk more about political actions and include the youth into their conversation. They should let them express their opinions and learn how to accept the ones of other people. To object if they believe that something is not right, but simultaneously respect their discussants.

Tip: This the most important part of this resolution. You are advised to do your own research and find more information on the matter. However, you can base some of your clauses on the solutions above by improving and extending them. Bear in mind that the solutions that you will propose should be realistic, namely, to be enforced de facto.

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