

Committee/Council: Special Conference on Young People

Issue: Enhancing youth civic engagement and participation in decision-making and political processes and institutions.

Student Officer: Aikaterini Mouzaki

Position: Co-Chair

Introduction

In the world of the 21st century, humanity, having already experienced several conflicts, political, social and economic instability, calls for a messiah to find solutions to all our problems, to lead us into an era of prosperity and security.

This new messiah is for many the youth. We all have heard expressions like “the youth is our future”, “we did what we could it is the youth’s duty to come up with new ideas”, “the new generation will have to deal with it, since they’ve learnt from our mistakes and they are more informed than we were”. However, people under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions. It is a fact that in one-third of the countries eligibility for the national parliament begins at the age of 25. Consequently, young people are not represented adequately in formal political institutions and processes.

In the Middle East, younger people are politically active through “political movements” and not through engaging in political parties. It is obvious that in both cases the issue should be addressed. It is contradictory to put so much pressure on youth when our society does not provide the necessary tools and opportunities for their voices to be raised.

Formal and informal engagement of the youth in civic life understood as political participation can lead to a brighter world, where the voices of many different social, civic and age groups are heard. It is beneficial for a vivid and resilient democracy and should therefore definitely be supported.

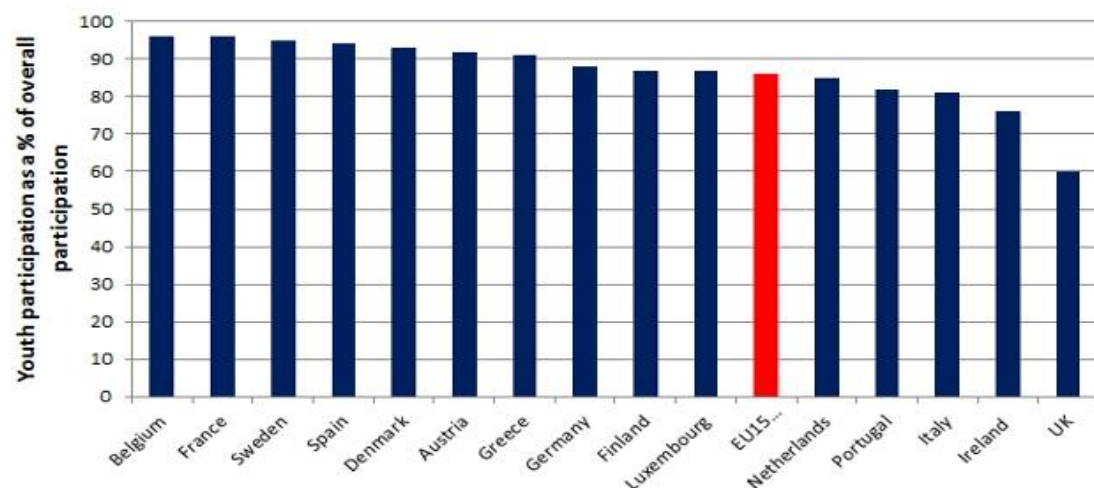


Figure 1: Eight activities were included in calculating total participation rates: 'voting in last national election', 'working for a party or action group', 'working for another [political] group association', 'displaying a badge or sticker', 'signing a petition', 'joining a boycott', 'participating in a demonstration'

Source: European Social Survey cumulative data (waves 1 to 4, 2000-2008)

Definition of Key-Terms

Youth¹

The United Nations defines youth as “the period of transition between childhood or being dependent, and adulthood (independence), and the awareness of interdependence as members of the community,” rather than a fixed age group (UNESCO). Other organizations understand youth as a stage of life marked by a number of critical transitions including physiological, psychological, social and economic changes (AIYD and InterAction 2013). Although the age range for this transition period can vary, for statistical purposes and to facilitate country comparisons, the United Nations uses 15 to 24 years of age to define youth. Nonetheless, for activities at national and local levels, youth is sometimes defined differently by governments or organizations, starting earlier and extending beyond 24. An example is the African Charter that refers to youth as any person between ages of 15 to 35 (UNESCO).

Civic engagement²

Civic engagement means working to make a difference in the civic life of our communities and developing the combination of knowledge, skills, values, and motivation to make that difference. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.

Decision-making³

Decision making is characterized as the act or process of deciding something especially with a group of people.

Political movement⁴

A political movement is a group of people working together to achieve a political goal. Every action and decision made by members of a political movement aim the fulfillment of the political goal.

¹ Information provided by a report of the ChildFund, 2014

² Definition provided by the New York Times, *Civic Responsibility and Higher Education*, edited by Thomas Ehrlich, published by Oryx Press, 2000.

³ Defined by the Learner's Dictionary.

⁴ Defined by Dictionary-Definition: Vocabulary.com

Political party⁵

A political party, a group of people organized to acquire and exercise political power. Political parties originated in their modern form in Europe and the United States in the 19th century, along with the electoral and parliamentary systems, whose development reflects the evolution of parties. The term party has since come to be applied to all organized groups seeking political power, whether by democratic elections or by revolution.

Political processes⁶

They are processes of the formulation and administration of public policy usually by interaction between social groups and political institutions or between political leadership and public opinion.

Service Programs⁷

Service programmes are programmes that involve citizens, mainly youth, with the aim to support national development.

Participation⁸

Participation is the involvement of different members of society. Participation can be either direct or through intermediate institutions or representatives. It may range from exercising full voting rights and decision-making capabilities to playing a consultative role.

Collective action⁹

With Collective action, we mean a joint action by a group of people towards achieving a common goal.

Social Capital¹⁰

It is the shared knowledge, understandings, norms, rules and expectations that groups of individuals bring to recurrent activities. These norms are important for people's livelihoods, development programmes, and economic growth.

⁵ Definition provided by the Encyclopedia Britannica, Maurice Duverger

⁶ Defined by Merriam-Webster

⁷ Defined by the international ChildFund

⁸ Definition provided by the international ChildFund, based on Camino and Zeldin, 2002

⁹ Defined by the international ChildFund, based on MeinzenDick, and McCarthy, 2004

¹⁰ Defined by the international ChildFund

Background Information

It is of great importance to include the new generation in decision-making and political processes as it is beneficial for both the young individuals and those directly interested in the events, but also if achieved, the international community.

Advantages

Being politically active and civically engaged has plenty of benefits for the adolescents. The youth gains skills such as confidence, self-efficacy, leadership, and learns how to deal with difficulties and to take on more responsibilities. All these qualifications together with contacts in a wider social network make them more attractive candidates in the employment market. Community service activities and programmes give young people the opportunity to gain real-life capacities, acquire knowledge, skills, and experiences that enhance their livelihood opportunities to operate in increasingly competitive labor markets. Finally, it could contribute to decreasing youth unemployment (ICP 2010).

Our society will also benefit in many different sectors. In post-conflict contexts and in war zones, opportunities to participate in social or reconstruction projects make young people see themselves as resources for positive social change. It is a way to support resilience building. In the long term, civic engagement contributes to social capital and development efforts. It counteracts violence and holistic actions since social capital includes values such as being a “good” citizen, including social and political trust, respect for pluralism and diversity, understanding of democracy, tolerance of others, understanding of diplomacy as the only way of promoting peace and stability.

“If young people are civically engaged, they will be more likely to develop and exhibit forms of social capital that are conducive to the functioning of democracy, and to peaceful co-existence.”

~Mercy Corps, 2012~

“If young people are civically engaged, they will be less likely to become involved in or support the use of violence to promote political objectives”

~Mercy Corps, 2012~

Categories

There are some more definitions-categories to civic engagement, which differ. All definitions-categories of civic engagement have to do with active participation

beyond civic awareness, or the understanding of civic duty. Some of which are the following:

- ❖ *Civic engagement as community service*: when an individual has to take on the responsibilities of citizenship, including active participation, either as an individual or in concert with others, in volunteer service activities that contribute to the local community.
- ❖ *Civic engagement as political involvement*: there is a difference between civic engagement and an individual ethic of service in that it leads individual efforts towards collective action in addressing issues through our political process.
- ❖ *Civic engagement as collective action*¹¹: the means by which an individual, through collective action, influence the larger civil society.

Significant facts and further information

- 1.65% of parliamentarians around the world are in their 20s and 11.87 % are in their 30s, according to UNDP and IPU, (2012) Global Parliamentary Report.
- In the Middle East, since the Arab Awakening, young people stay politically active through “political movements”. Young adults are politically active in universities if allowed, but they do not gain political leadership positions often. As a result, they are excluded from policy development. The political activism of youth is not organized. It opposes formal groupings.
- The focus on the young and on this issue, in particular, is a relatively new priority. Alarming recent events in the Arab States, and in other regions, have pushed our society to take actions. The “World Program of Action for Youth for 2000 and beyond” highlighted the significance of youth participation in decision-making, but did not offer concrete interventions at the time.
- As mentioned before, people under the age of 35 are rarely found in formal political leadership positions. In a third of all the countries, eligibility for national parliament starts at 25 years or higher. According to “Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle”, which is a Good Practice Guide-, and which was published by UNDP, in December 2012, it is common practice to refer to politicians as ‘young’ if they are below 35-40 years of age. Youth is not represented adequately in formal political institutions and processes such as Parliaments, political parties, elections, and public administrations.
- In a survey conducted by the UN IANYD in August 2012, a majority of 13,000 respondents expressing their voices from 186 countries revealed that the

¹¹ Information provided by Van Benschoten qtd in Adler and Goggin, 2005

main challenges for youth were limited opportunities for effective participation in decision-making processes.

- Both young women and women at mid-level and decision-making/leadership positions experience discrimination and find difficulties in becoming delegates and representatives for the national parliament. Young women feel excluded and restricted in their communities.

For more information you can visit the following websites:

1. UNDP's work on Democratic Governance:
<http://www.undp.org/governance>
2. UNDP's work on Youth:
http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/ourwork/democraticgovernance/projects_and_initiatives/dggyouth/unyouth/
3. UNDP's Publication on Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle –A good practice guide:
http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democraticgovernance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/enhancing-youth-political-participationthroughout-the-electoral/
4. UNDP4YOUTH Teamworks Space:
<https://one.unteamworks.org/undp4youth>

You can also watch the following related videos:

1. Youth engagement in politics indifferent or just different¹²:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDFLzyk94k>
2. Youth Participation in decision-making¹³:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dgi87VOPluk>



Image 1: UN on youth.

¹² TEDxYouth@Victoria, Jacob Helliwell

¹³ Youth Association, the official Representative of the World YMCA in Kosovo

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

Nigeria

In Nigeria's 2015 general elections, over 60% of voters were dominated by young eligible voters of the country. Youth constituted the largest percentage of registered voters. Namely, Nigeria is one of the most youthful populations worldwide, because of its increasing population. The National Youth Policy defines youth as all young people between 18 – 35 years. According to national legislation, requirements for offices such as, the offices of President, Vice-President, Governor, Deputy Governor and Senate, leave only a small margin for the participation of those who have attained the maximum age of 35 years. Young people are excluded from contesting. Only the House of Representatives and State Assembly positions allows for youth candidacy.

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) supported youth based CSO (Civil Society Organization) to actively engage in the Constitution review process. A submission of memorandum to the constitution review committees of the National Assembly is included. Ahead of the 2015 election, A Nigerian Youth Agenda on Political Participation together with a Nigerian Youth Inter party Forum is now being discussed and developed. The forum will mainly consist of youth members across party lines and its aim is to bring together young people so that they can discuss issues of common interest and increase political participation.

Bangladesh

It is very crucial to refer to the youth's understanding of democracy as a political system and their expectations of it in Bangladesh.

The single majority response to questions raised regarding their understanding of democracy as their political system, was 'do not know' or 'can not say' made by 24 percent altogether. This might be because of the lack of awareness or interest. But overall awareness for democracy is not so low since collectively 60 percent defined democracy in ways that somewhat meets standard definitions: the right of free expression (18%), equal rights of all (15%), freedom of movement (16%) and casting a ballot (11%).

But when young people were asked about 'the essentials for democracy,' they emphasized on the above mentioned issues but underlined aspects such as: free and fair election (66%), freedom of religion (48%), freedom of expression (43%), maintenance of law and order (43%), fulfillment of basic needs (40%), equal rights of all (38%) and the absence of bribery (35%) and no violence against women (31%).¹⁴

Youth's expectations of democracy do not lean to their experiences.

¹⁴ 'The Daily Star-Nielsen Democracy Poll 2011'

UNDP supported the establishment of a National Youth Parliament to empower active citizens at both local and national level. It gives the youth the opportunity to contribute to the framing of national policy through direct dialogue with actual parliamentarians.

Jordan

In Jordan, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) uses a programme to promote democratic methods and community action among young people. Through “Ana Usharek” (“I Participate”), university students all over the country familiarize themselves with human rights, democratic values and political systems, nonviolent dispute resolutions, and civic responsibility. As the program has developed, young people’s interest and participation in politics and civil society did increase, and more Jordanians are being introduced to democratic ideas.

You can watch this related video: <https://youtu.be/R2WeGvdWOjI>¹⁵

The UNDP has piloted and supervised two debate training programmes and prior to that had trained a group of 15 young trainers, in collaboration with the Ministry of Political Development (MoPD) to strengthen youth political participation. The UNDP programme supported MoPD to develop a database of youth online groups so as to systematically solicit input from youth groups on how to bring youth participation in the nation’s political life. UNDP has also supported MoPD to intensify its engagement with youth through Facebook and twitter. The ‘Youth Participation in Youth and Political Participation Local Governance’ project has sponsored an innovation camp for young people that focuses on activities such as: interactive training courses on public discourse, the use of social media for development and mock elections. A partnership with the Princess Samara University for Technology supports the development of a local governance game to engage young people online, similar to ‘DemocraTweet’ in Tunisia.

Lebanon

The Lebanese Parliamentary Internship Programme has been expanded to more Lebanese graduates of all universities in Lebanon, giving them an opportunity to participate in public policy making. It introduces them to the legislative and oversight functions of the Parliament and its function in the framework of parliamentary diplomacy in regional and national issues.

On the International Day of Democracy a conference on “Democratic Transitions in the Arab World and their Impact on Lebanon “ was held with the participation of youth and women in political parties. The purpose of the conference was to enhance public awareness on democracy. The UNDP is now working with the relevant parliamentary committees to implement the strategy, including any possible changes to laws that are required.

¹⁵ NDI, Ana Usharek, shortest video.

European countries

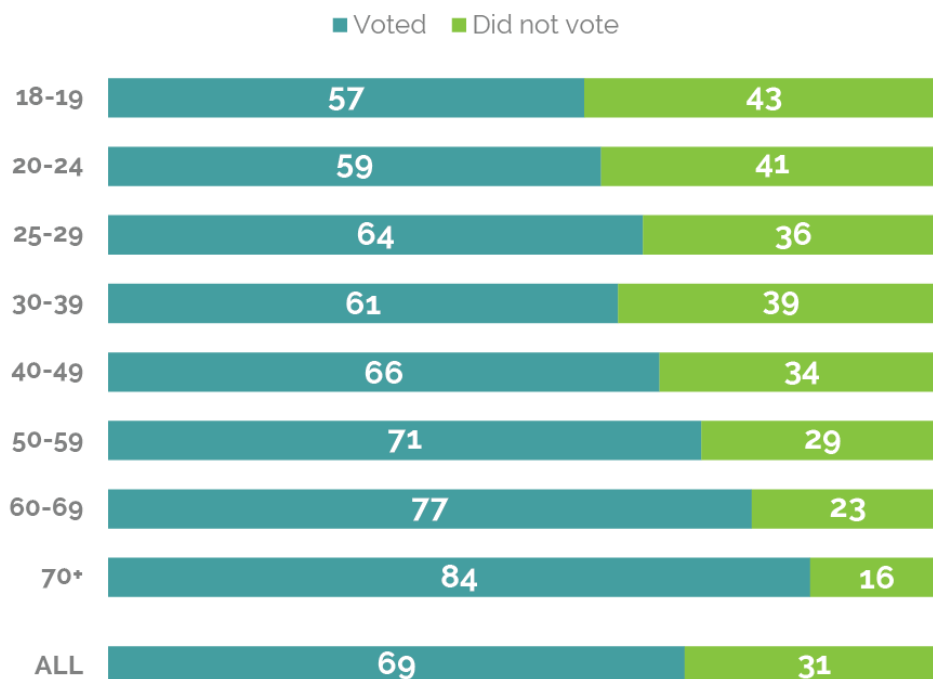
In Europe, an increased number of young men and women call for meaningful civic, economic, social and political participation. The UNDP tries to improve the current situation, operating in many countries to promote inclusive youth participation in effective and democratic governance and to counteract the phenomenon of non-voters. The YMCA has also shown interest in addressing the issue in Europe. In 2011, a programme called YMCA Europe in action for the EU Youth Strategy aimed to enable young European in politics.

United Kingdom

The UK's Measuring National Well-being Survey of 2014 showed that 42 per cent of surveyed 16-24-year-olds claimed to be totally uninterested in politics.¹⁶ Youth participation in UK civic life is far from active, apparently.

Turnout by age

Based on a survey of 52,615 GB adults about their vote in the 2017 general election



YouGov | yougov.com

June 9-13, 2017

Figure 2: YouGov conducts one of Britain's biggest ever post-election surveys to chart how the nation's political character is shifting. In electoral terms, age seems to be the new dividing line in British politics. Amongst first time voters (those aged 18 and 19), Labour was forty-seven percentage points ahead. Amongst those aged over 70, the Conservatives had a lead of fifty percentage points.

¹⁶ Jacqueline Briggs, University of Lincoln

United Nations Development Program-UNDP

The United Nations development programme, an international development agency and a subsidiary of the United Nations, established to promote sustainable development, democratic governance-peace building and climate and disaster resilience, recognizes the involvement of both young men and women in participatory decision-making and development processes as vital to achieving sustainable human development. It operates in many different parts of the world and has developed many different programs focusing on the empowerment of the youth.

-You can also research the following organizations:

- I. YMCA
- II. International Youth Foundation and its Youth Empowerment Programme
- III. International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organisations
- IV. National Youth Leadership Council
- V. National Youth Rights Association
- VI. Child Fund

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
1945	The draw up of the United Nations charter.
1965	Establishment of UNDP with the aim to help countries eliminate poverty and achieve sustainable human development.
1985	International Youth Year.
September 8th, 2011	The UN General Assembly passed the "World Programme of Action for Youth" resolution which stated the importance of youth participation in decision making. While this was an important step, it didn't offer an actual concrete solution.

Relevant UN Treaties, Resolutions and Events

Convention on the Rights of the Child

“Resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 entry into force 2 September 1990, in accordance with article 49”

It is the most widely and rapidly ratified international rights treaty. After the International Youth Year, the General Assembly defined youth participation as comprising four components: economic participation, relating to work and development; political participation, relating to decision-making processes; social participation, relating to community involvement; and cultural participation, relating to the arts, cultural values, and expression. All four elements are reaffirmed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

World Youth Forum

"Empowering Youth for Action" was the theme of the fourth session of the World Youth Forum of the United Nations system. That meeting, which was convened by the UN in partnership with the Senegalese National Youth Council, was held in Dakar, Senegal, from 6 to 10 August 2001. Over 300 delegates representing youth organizations from around the world met with representatives of the UN system and other intergovernmental organizations to focus on youth empowerment issues and challenges of the twenty-first century.

“A splendid example of young people coming together to work out their own agenda, without waiting for governments to tell them what to do.”

~ Secretary-General Kofi Annan for the World Youth Forum

UN Special Session on Children

From 8 to 10 May 2002, the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on Children took place, where the nations of the world committed themselves to a series of goals to improve the situation of children and young people. Four governments had youth representatives address the General Assembly on behalf of their respective countries (the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Togo). During the session, the Children’s Forum introduced the following statement: “raised awareness and respect among people of all ages about every child’s right to full and meaningful participation ... [and for children to be] ... actively involved in decision-making at all levels and in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating all matters affecting the rights of the child”.

Previous Attempts to solve the Issue

UNDP Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund (DGTTF)

In 2011, the DGTTF supported suggestions from UNDP country offices. Projects on youth to be informed about public policy-making, to empower democratic governance and to train young people as leaders became a reality. In total, 37 proposals were accepted, out of which 9 were 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.

The UNDP's Strategy of Response to Transformative Change Championed by Youth in the Arab Region

Acknowledging the significance of youth civic engagement, the UNDP suggested measures aiming to job creation, social inclusion, and youth volunteerism. Unfortunately, there are no valuable activities targeting political participation.

Country examples

In many different countries, a variety of projects and multiple attempts were put forward, either supervised by NGO's (Non-Governmental Organizations) or by IGO's (Inter-Governmental Organizations).

- ◆ **Mongolia: Youth Empowerment through Civic Education.** In Mongolia, the Ministry of Social Welfare has developed a youth policy. The project has developed suggestions for revising civic education focused on youth. There are trained young journalists, and a Facebook group 'DemoCrazy' is set up.
- ◆ **Azerbaijan: Youth Participation in Decision Making and Policy Implementation.** A way of assessment concerning national policies responding to youth concerns has developed. Also, a draft monitoring and evaluation plan for the State Programme on Azerbaijani Youth has been created.



Image 2: UNDP -logo

Possible Solution

What the delegates have to deal with, is, how youth civic engagement and participation in politics can be enhanced. They must take the policy of the country one represents, the current policy of different nations and the already existing legislation, as well as, signed and ratified Conventions and Treaties into consideration.

They shall bear in mind that you should submit clauses, which will:

- Promote the encouragement of youth's participation in inclusive political processes and democratic practices focusing on individual capacity building.
- Support the inclusion of young people in all levels of development processes, including decision making by targeting UN governance and processes.
- Suggest ways to counteract sexism and discrimination, promoting gender equality, in the field of politics, focusing on young women.
- Call for the promotion of policies and legal frameworks, which will boost young people's participation at local, national and international levels, in a variety of institutions and processes, such as, public administration and local governance, but also in electoral and parliamentary processes.
- Recommend ways to increase young women's participation in democratic activities and their presence in political offices at all levels.
- Urge governments to foster the involvement and active participation of youth in young people-led organizations in UN governance and decision-making processes.¹⁷
- Support by any means educational programs and workshops raising awareness on the issue, but at the same time providing initiatives for both young people and young people-led organizations to contribute to finding efficient solutions for humanitarian and peace building recovery. They should also focus on the promotion of young people's skills and capabilities, with the aim of turning them into active, dedicated leaders that contribute to global efforts to attain sustainable human development as a long-term investment.

To assure that the clauses-resolutions efficient and realistic proposals, your clauses-resolutions should definitely answer the following questions:

- ✓ How can this idea become a reality? How could this be implementable and even possible?
- ✓ Should the UN (in collaboration with its related agencies, such as the UNDP) help countries create a more "open" and flexible legal framework for youth's participation in politics? What happens with countries defining differently the

¹⁷ post-2015 agenda in particular.

term youth? What could the UN in collaboration with governments and nonstate actors do to make ends meet when it comes to international participation in global processes and institutions in conjunction with the countries different policies?

- ✓ How will the UN make sure that the existing treaties, legislation, and conventions are being respected?

You can also watch the following related videos:

1. How can we engage young people in politics¹⁸:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iw9Q-EKaIXM>
2. How to get young people to vote¹⁹:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLYpMGI6iNQ>

Bibliography

Bales, Susan, Verona Christmas Best, Marcelo Diversi, Rainer Silbereisen, and Milbrey McLaughlin. "Pages 121-148." *Journal of Research on Adolescence-Youth Civic Engagement in the 21st Century*. By James Youniss. Vol. 12. N.p.: Wiley Online Library, n.d. N. pag. Print.

"Civic Responsibility and Higher Education." *The New York Times*. Ed. Thomas Ehrlich. The New York Times, 07 July 2003. Web. 27 June 2017.

"Mission Statement of the American Democracy Project." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 07 July 2003. Web. 27 June 2017.

"Participating Institutions in the American Democracy Project for Civic Engagement." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 09 July 2003. Web. 27 June 2017.

"Decision-making." *Decision-making - Definition for English-Language Learners from Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary*. N.p., n.d. Web. 27 June 2017.

"Political Movement - Dictionary Definition." *Vocabulary.com*. N.p., 2014. Web. 27 June 2017.

¹⁸ TEDxLSE, Mete Coban

¹⁹ TEDxHousesofParliament, Rick Edwards

"Political Process." *Merriam-Webster*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 27 June 2017.

Duverger, Maurice. "Political Party." *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 24 Apr. 2014. Web. 27 June 2017.

UN. "Youth, Political Participation and Decision-Making." *YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION* (n.d.): n. pag. United Nations. Web. 1 July 2017.

Haque, Kazi. "Youth in Bangladesh Democracy." *The Daily Star*. N.p., 16 Nov. 2011. Web. 03 July 2017.

Authors, YIAGA. "Engaging Nigeria's Youths in Political Processes after the 2015 General Elections by Ibrahim Faruk." *YIAGA*. N.p., 29 Mar. 2016. Web. 03 July 2017.

Admin. "Youth Political Participation in Jordan: A Middle East Success Story." *Admin*. N.p., 18 May 2017. Web. 03 July 2017.

Briggs, Jacqueline. "Youth Political Participation in UK." *Bang the Table-All about Engagement*. BangTheTable, 1 Dec. 2016. Web.

"Youth Empowerment." *UNDP*. UN, n.d. Web. 03 July 2017.

"WORLD YOUTH FORUM OF UN SYSTEM TO MEET IN DAKAR, 6-10 AUGUST | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases." *United Nations*. United Nations, n.d. Web. 04 July 2017.

"Special Session on Youth." *Special Session on Children - UNICEF*. United Nations, n.d. Web. 04 July 2017.

"Convention on the Rights of the Child." *UNICEF*. United Nations, n.d. Web. 04 July 2017.

Images

Figure 1: *Young People Are Less Likely to Vote than Older Citizens, but They Are Also More Diverse in How They Choose to Participate in Politics*. Digital image. *LSE-London School of Economics and Political Science*. EUROPP, n.d. Web. 27 June 2017.

Figure 2: Curtis, Chris. "How Britain Voted at the 2017 General Election." *YouGov: What the World Thinks*. YouGov, n.d. Web. 03 July 2017.

Image 1: UN. "Youth, Political Participation and Decision-Making." *YOUTH, POLITICAL PARTICIPATION* (n.d.): n. pag. United Nations. Web. 1 July 2017.

Image 2: "Youth Empowerment." *UNDP*. UN, n.d. Web. 03 July 2017.
