

INTERNATIONAL **YOUTH** THINK TANK

A PATH FOR DEMOCRACY

From Engagement to Impact

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Introduction

In democracies around the world, we are witnessing an alarming surge in disengagement and discontent in democratic bodies – paving the way for dangerous authoritarian factions. As a consequence, citizens are feeling excluded from democratic policymaking with their **needs not being met, voices not being heard and impact not being felt**.

The IYTT's 5th International Youth Conference, titled "From Engagement to Impact: Voicing Needs for Trust in Democracy", aims at bridging the gap between theory and practice through discussions with one another, as well as on the streets of Barcelona. Crucially, we aim to empower communities, influence policymakers and nurture democratic governance at a local, national and global level.

Through this report, we want the reader to embark on a journey. We have created a path for democracy encompassing *Democratic Foundations*, *Youth*, *Technology* and *Community Engagement* and *Workplace*. Proposal by proposal, we offer the opportunity for every societal actor to be a leading figure advocating for change.

Foundations include ground proposals that point to the core of democratic processes. Frequently, anti-democratic forces exploit structures to seize or maintain power and suppress potential opposition. For all efforts of improvement to be effective, we first need to establish democratic bases for human rights to be respected.

Youth is the foundation of a sustainable democratic community. Through an emphasis on theoretical as well as practical democratic education, we want to ensure that young people are included and want to engage in democratic processes. Using youth quotas and fair compensation helps guarantee that their voices are heard and valued.

Technology tackles the increasing importance of social media regulation and the role algorithms play in forming public opinion. Through incorporating Artificial Intelligence and fostering digital platforms, we want to facilitate dialogue as well as critical thinking regarding democracy.

Community Engagement addresses the transition between a responsible use of technological platforms and democratic civic participation. In order to strengthen an active civic society, we aim at channeling the potential of technology within the proposals.

Workplace encourages public and private employees in political engagement. In light of time constraints and the lack of specific spaces to foster political dialogue, our proposals aim to use non-formal methodologies to overcome these barriers.

1. Supervision Human Rights in Elections

1.1 Challenges

Proof for the internal corrosion with democratic systems can be found worldwide, be that in functioning democracies, failing ones, or even governments that just assume the label of “democracy” without complying to fundamental democratic principles in the first place. Many times, one can observe the abuse of structures by anti-democratic forces from within in order to gain or keep power and silence potential opposition. Whenever governing systems are undermined or kept alive that way, the protection of human rights is at stake.

For this proposal, two considerations need to be made preemptively.

Firstly, democracy is a very relative term. Not only is it a concept without a set definition (which would, one might argue, make it inherently obsolete), but it can also be interpreted, applied and claimed in very different ways. Therefore, this proposal focuses on the enforcement of the international law of human rights. Admittedly, human rights as well are subject to interpretation, but they cannot be up to relativisation at their core. Democracy is the only currently existing concept of government that has the capacity to truly enshrine human rights. In conclusion, the more a system is bound to human rights, the more likely it is to be democratic. Consequently, enforcing human rights strengthens democratic performance.

The second consideration concerns possibilities of external influence on individual state regulations, particularly when trying to push a country towards a certain way of government. Those need to be looked at with a lot of precaution regarding the possibility of cultural and moral arrogance when imposing one's own system as the “right”, therefore superior one. Besides, in the current global network the state is (in most cases) the highest entity when it comes to binding legislation. Countries are responsible for their inner structuring, and any outside influence is considerably a violation of sovereignty. This always needs to be taken into account.

1.2 Proposal

We propose the implementation of a 5th entity within the Human Rights Council. The existing four entities are the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), the Special Procedures, the Advisory Committee and the Complaint Procedure. They regularly assess the human rights situations of all United Nations Member States, speak out on themes such as education, health, free speech, and human trafficking, as well as on country specific situations and provide expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues.

Our 5th entity should be a Supervising Procedure to complement the already existing structures and benefit from the framework and legitimacy the HRC holds within the UN. The committee shall be triggered by any national elections happening in the world. Inspired by the mechanism of supervision of elections by the OSCE, it has the assignment to check electoral campaigns of all parties running for parliament. The question to be answered is: **Does the content of these campaigns align with the international law of human rights?**

The findings of the Supervising Procedure will be made public through a report. As a symbolic sanction, the committee is to “flag” any manifest violation of the international law of human rights.

1.3 Impacts

First and foremost, the aim is to create public and international awareness for intentional anti-human rights policy making. Parties that actively advocate for non-aligned legislations will have to defend and explain themselves publicly. At the same time, destructive forces will not be able to undermine systems unseen.

It is up to the respective countries and their jurisdiction to decide on further proceedings after parties have been “flagged”. As already mentioned, there can be no outside censoring or even banning of political activity within a country. However, once brought to the public, there will be a certain “peer pressure” to perform better and maybe motivate flagged parties to modify their campaigns in order to align with human rights. It is particularly important that the proposal is bound to these instead of the debatable term of democracy, as every government or leading force that is supposed to protect its citizens will struggle to keep integrity whilst not ensuring human rights.

As a short term result, questionable party manifestos will become a topic of public discourse. In International Relations, the status of a country's political players can be an indicator for other governments on how to judge its credibility.

In the long run, this would ideally lead to less parties running for parliament that try to corrode the system from within and therefore better performing democracies. Additionally, it could ensure a more thorough respect for human rights worldwide, which is the overarching goal.

Of course, interfering with political processes in general raises the concern of a certain censoring of the freedom of speech. However, with this proposal tied to the protection of human rights at their core, it is not only acceptable, but needed to create awareness for grave human rights violations.

2. Experts by Experience and by Education

2.1 Challenges

All decisions that affect a population, should be made in partnership with representations of the population. Currently decision makers are making decisions without engaging with the population affected and assumptions are being made at times. The population has a large amount of unique experience. Those with valuable experiences but no political experience are being left out of key decisions.

2.2 Proposal

A policy suggestion in which experts by experience and experts through education work in partnership with political leaders, councillors and within politics.

First of all, the definition of the categories of experts has to be clarified:

Expert by Experience - an individual who has personal experience, also known as lived experience, of a problem, challenge or topic. For example someone who has accessed mental health services is an expert by experience of mental health services.

Expert by Education - an individual who has gained a wealth of knowledge through education, a job or research. For example a teacher could be an expert through education

The process (see diagram below):

A job role would be posted for experts by experience on specific topics that are being looked at within the government. For example they may be recruiting for young people who have experience of the education system, someone within lived experience of mental health services or an unemployed individual.

Applications would be received and collected.

A jury would then be collected from the public through a random selection. The jury would be individuals within the same field as the experts by experience. They would vote for who they want to represent their population. More than one expert by experience may be elected so that the ratios of people within the team are fair.

One of the unique aspects of the proposal is that the expert(s) by experience are offered full time job roles where they work in partnership with expert(s) by education, departments within the government, politicians...

Another innovative aspect of the proposal is the role would involve community engagement, sharing their voice, co-produce policies, joining debates but would not vote within parliament. All points raised by the expert would need to be responded to by the

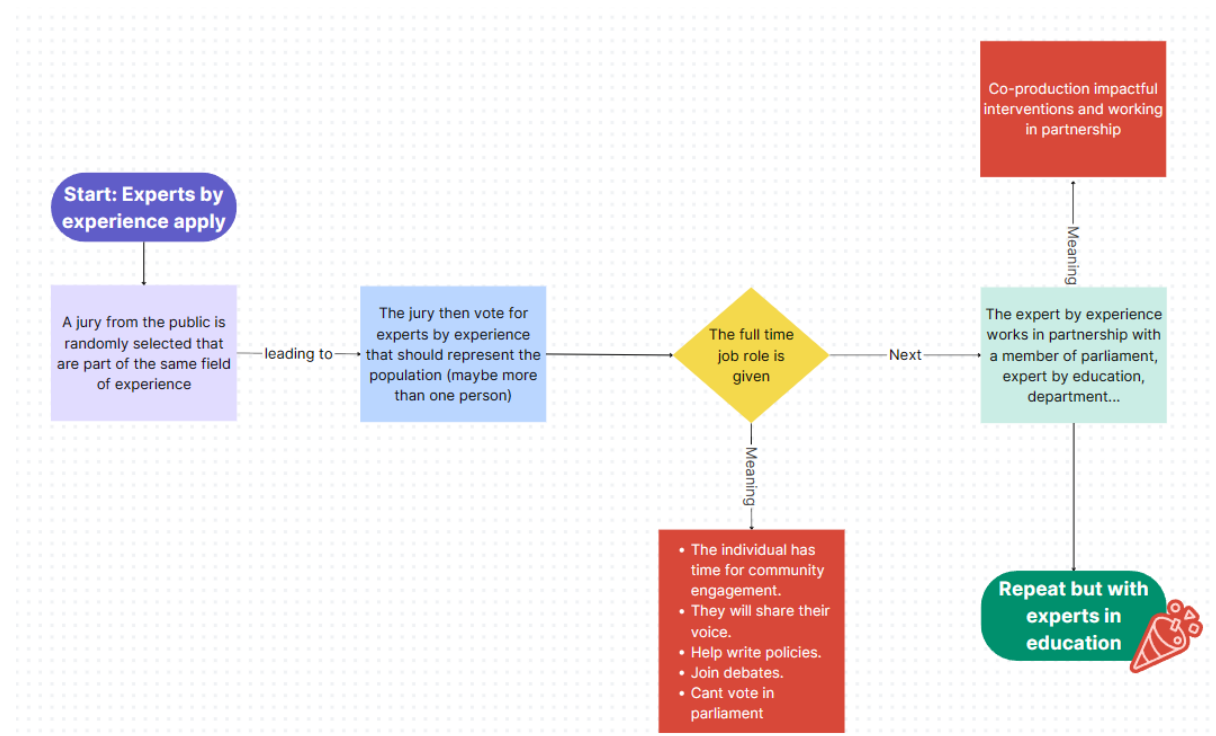
decision maker(s) to the public transparently. This would involve what actions have been taken and if the point hasn't been taken further, why.

This process can be repeated with experts by education and should be applied to all situations that involve decisions about a population. All decisions that affect a community should be made in partnership and collaboration with the community.

2.3 Impacts

The population would have their voice represented effectively and there would be peer engagement completed to ensure the community is correctly understood. Community trust would increase because of the transparency of actions and decisions would be made based on their voice not an assumption.

Policies and decisions would meet the community's needs and over time would reduce wastage of money, time and resources. A more diverse range of people would be within the decision makers which would enhance future thinkers and intergenerational collaboration.



3. Quotas for Youth in the Parliament

3.1. Challenges

Youth underrepresentation, disengagement

The world is home to 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10-24 – the largest generation of youth in history. Nonetheless, this large proportion of the population is significantly underrepresented and thus is not taken into account as part of the policy-making process.

People in political decision-making across the globe tend to be much older than the average voter.

According to data from the OECD, in 2020, only 22% of members of parliaments (MPs) were under the age of 40. Other research has shown that the percentage of MPs younger than 30 in the national parliaments of OECD countries is higher than 2% only in exceptional cases. In comparison, 20-39 years old represent 34% of the voting-age population on average across all OECD countries.

In some cases (namely Italy, Finland and Norway) the share of young MPs is larger than the share of young people in the voting-age population. It could be argued that this could be due to the current ageing demographics of these countries, rather than any real inclusion of the youth.

As a consequence of this lack of representation, the youth has long felt excluded from politics, leading to general disenchantment and feeling of distrust regarding the public institutions. All of these factors act as clear deterrents to the functioning of a healthy, democratic system that represents the population as a whole. With our proposal, we aim to effectively tackle the issue in a practical way, while also considering its viability for the different cultures and political systems throughout the globe.

3.2. Proposal

Youth quotas in parliaments

We propose the implementation of youth quotas in Parliaments to acknowledge the percentage of youth in the country.

We aim for this measure to attain a more inclusive representation of the demographics of each country, taking into account the intersectional nature of all population groups. The ageing demographics in European and Western countries further reinforces the need for young representation. As the population ages, older generations hold more political power for the simple fact that they are more numerous. Youth quotas can assure that

younger generations partake in political discussions even in cases when they do not make up a large part of the country's demographics.

When discussing the youth quotas, an inevitable question pops up: what age should be considered “young” in politics? Many United Nations Bodies define youth as individuals aged 15–24. But since young people rarely gain office before the age of 35, an age threshold of 40–45 years has become common in defining MPs as young. However, the whole point of this proposal is lowering this threshold. Therefore, the youth quotas should only include people under 35 years of age.

Practical solutions:

- **Legal candidate quotas** (constitutional and/or legislative): young candidates should be included in the lists of all political parties. The implementation of this measure needs to take into account the elective system of each country, because its impact hinges on the condition that youth representatives are placed in electable positions within their lists. In the case of closed-list proportional representation, it should be specified that the youth be included in the top positions of the list.
- **Reserved seats in parliaments** (constitutional and/or legislative): This measure should go hand-in-hand with the former, to avoid the reserved seats from being left with no representatives as a consequence of parties refusing to include young candidates on their lists.
- **Voluntary political party quotas:** It has been brought up that voluntary quotas risk being ineffective. It is then necessary to carefully consider the adequacy of this option for each particular context.

As youth quotas are a relatively new form of intervention, research conducted on the implementation of gender quotas are an informative source for the success of political quotas over the long term. Adaptation of existing measures that were put in place for the implementation of gender quotas could become the starting point for youth quotas.

The dynamics of political transition have been shown to be a particularly favourable environment for the adoption of electoral quotas (for example, during the creation of new electoral laws). There are, however, some risks to be taken into account. In countries where youth quotas have been implemented after a citizen revolution, it has been observed that a significant part of the young population perceived the political youth organisations as elitist. Consequently, the youth who effectuated the revolution did not

feel represented by the appointed younger politicians who occupied the roles established by the quotas.

Therefore, it is necessary to accompany this measure with the implementation of a strong political education along with the creation of spaces that encourage participation of people from different backgrounds, to avoid the lack of diversity within youth representation. These propositions can also serve as a means to nurture new political leaders. To avoid tokenism, we propose to establish a new department on Participation and Inclusion within the UN that will serve as a platform for discussion and exchange of best practices.

Acknowledging that young people are a heterogeneous group is key for the success of this initiative, and the circumstances and diversity within each country should be taken into account when designing the pertinent reforms.

3.3. Impact

The inclusion of youth in parliaments is an empowering measure and an awakening call to tackle pressing youth-specific issues that are not given the importance they deserve by already existing policies or institutions, such as climate change, education, employment or housing.

Proportional representation leads to higher voter turnout due to the building of trust in the democratic system and institutions among young people. The enhancement and empowerment of young political referents is also a helpful tool to increase engagement in politics among youth.

As it has been discussed in the former section, the aging demographics in Western countries plays an important role in youth representation. The implementation of this proposal would result in more youth-friendly policies, which would, in turn, create a more favourable, stable environment for young people. This measure could therefore have a beneficial impact regarding the ageing of the population in these countries.

The inclusion of youth in parliaments will foster a sense of inclusion and representation among that slice of the population. Moreover, it could become a catalysing force to change a state's political culture, render public institutions more inclusive, and, overall, strengthen democratisation.

4. Junior Elections

4.1 Challenge

Low youth engagement and knowledge in politics presents a significant concern for modern democracies.

This issue stems from various factors, the most important one clearly being the lack of touchpoints with democracy.

4.2 Proposal

SEPARATE JUNIOR ELECTIONS ARE HELD AT EVERY ELECTION

Context and reasoning

Voting is a habit

The first foundational thesis for this proposal is that voting is a habit. And the earlier the habit of voting is learned, the more likely it is that children and kids will stick to this behaviour.

A study by the University of Sheffield and the University of Edinburgh showed that giving younger people the right to vote improves long-term voting behaviour. This should be taken a step further by implementing this proposal.

Learning by watching

The second thesis is that this habit can be best learned by observing parents do it (observational learning). However, most children are not introduced to the democratic system by their parents, since oftentimes, when citizens can vote for the first time (between 18 and 22), they don't live with their parents anymore.

Since political education is not on the curriculum in most European countries, parents are one of the most important ways for kids and children to learn about democracy.

Early habit-forming

Children are more open and curious, and the things that captivate them can often continue to hold a special place in their hearts as they age. Habits developed in childhood often endure into adulthood, influenced by the brain's heightened plasticity during youth.

Proposal explanation

How does this work concretely?

1. Just like adults, every citizen under the legal voting age, starting at age 6, is getting an upfront invitation to vote at the Junior Election. This letter also contains detailed educational info material on the voting process, made for the age group.
2. At every election, a separate election is held on the same day for kids and children
3. The process is identical to the real election. Kids and children:

- a. Can go to the local polling station with their parents
 - b. Have the same voting choices as in the real election
 - c. Have the same process of going to the voting booth
4. The ballots are then put into a separate box and counted after the real election ballots has been counted
5. As part of the news reporting on the election day, the junior election results are also proclaimed and analysed

4.3 Impact

One might say, children at age 6 don't know anything about politics. That might be true for most. But that's exactly why it is important to provide opportunities and touchpoints with democracy, so children start asking, thinking, and learning about it. Junior elections have no real implications, but they are specific enough to provide such a learning opportunity.

- **Through junior elections, kids and children experience the democratic system way before they can take part in it**
- **It is very likely that junior elections will increase the voter turnout in the long run**

Furthermore, junior elections shouldn't be a substitute for lowering the minimum voting age to 16, it is one of the steps to make the youth educated enough to be able to vote responsibly at age 16.

Impact on parents

The impact could be double-sided: not only kids and children are getting motivated to vote by their parents already at a young age.

In families where parents don't vote, kids and children could motivate their parents to go to the polling station with them, because they want to take part in the junior election.

Conclusion

Kids and children are endlessly curious, willing to understand the world around them, and have not yet formed a strong opinion about politics and democracy. They strive to do "adult things". So let's take that chance to let them understand democracy at an early age. Because things that captivate us early can often continue to hold a special place in our hearts as we age.

5. Lowering the Voting Age to 16 and Educating Young Voters

5.1. Challenges

Students in Europe spend almost 7.300 hours per year at school, and most of them are dedicated to studying Maths, Biology, Economics or Chemistry. We can all agree these constitute essential subjects. However, why is politics not included in the curriculum of every country? After debating and knowing what is going on around the world, we realised that even if in Germany and in Sweden there are classes about politics until high school, in Portugal, Spain, Ukraine and Ecuador these classes are not a part of a curriculum.

Given its relevance in the understanding of concepts that greatly impact our lives, why not talk about Democracy in school?

5.2. Proposal

The goal is to dismantle the barriers that exclude youth from political life and guide them towards a stronger preparation for future active participation. It is fundamental to enable young people to have their own space and political say in order to contribute to the society they live in. Unfortunately this is not an equally accessible opportunity, geographically speaking, so we want to bring this to a global level.

Our main goal is to foster inclusion, education, empowerment and participation of the youth. Only then, as a consequence, we propose lowering the voting age to 16.

- **Participation:** the public education system should guarantee young people's access to all necessary tools in order to engage in debates, organize themselves in assemblies or school parliaments. All this facilitates and encourages their future participation in matters regarding higher institutions.
- **Education and Empowerment:** Education is the essential means through which we can accomplish our goal, the tool that becomes the meeting point between youth and democracy. Through proper education we will empower young minds to become the change they want to see.
- **Lowering the voting age:** Once provided with political education, young minds can turn their values and motivation into action to change the status quo. Lowering the voting age acts as a way to increase representation and participation of the youth.

The core of this proposal is the implementation of a theoretical and practical formation for students, starting from primary school and continuing until the end of high school. We suggest the introduction of a compulsory subject, as well as of programs on government systems, into school curriculum. In order to do that, we advise reaching relevant stakeholders and policy makers through the Youth Outreach Unit of the European Parliament and the European Parliaments flagship event for youth - EYE.

Raising awareness among the young and general public through campaigns is another option worth giving proper consideration.

Lowering the voting age can be implemented either top-down or down-top depending on the government apparatus. In the EU there could be a directive that will set lowering voting age as an objective.

- In countries where democratic education already exists, lowering the voting age can already be introduced as a suggestion to their governance.
- In countries that do not possess such a subject, it must be ensured, first and foremost, the implementation of an impartial and useful education regarding the political system of the country or region. Lowering the voting age to 16 should only be introduced as an option when the first generations of students that benefited from this politics education starting from primary school reaches age 16.
- In the case of countries, such as Ecuador, where the voting age is 16, but that do not include politics education in their curriculum, its implementation should be diligently encouraged.

The final product will be promoted through UNESCO, which we believe is a suitable platform for pioneering the project and taking action about education in Democracy in the world, including the youth.

5.3. Impact

The implementation of a subject concerning politics in the educational system at a global level will provide students with the necessary knowledge to make a change in the world, by understanding what democracy is, how the elections work, and why it is important for them to participate in political life.

After this implementation, we can proceed to the next step: lowering the voting age. We propose to lower the voting age to 16 in all types of elections. Lowering the voting age is a measure for fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy. In many countries the voting age comes years after reaching the working, driving and criminal responsibility age. By recognizing the political agency and awareness of younger generations, this reform acknowledges that individuals as young as 16 are actively engaged in civic life and possess a stake in the decisions that shape their future.

By extending the right to vote to a broader age demographic, we not only empower young people to directly influence policies that impact them but also instil a sense of civic responsibility from an earlier age. This shift not only enhances the democratic process by diversifying perspectives but also sends a powerful message about the importance of youth participation in shaping the trajectory of a nation.

Lowering voting age might motivate political parties to address the young electorate to include policies that will tackle the challenges that young people face. This might also

increase voter turnout of the young since they will feel more represented and therefore more likely to vote.

6. Public Positions for Youth

6.1. Challenge

Junior positions serve as a crucial element in building a talent pipeline for public institutions. By actively hiring individuals with limited professional experience, these organisations, mostly the public and governmental ones, invest in the future by developing a pool of skilled individuals who can eventually take on more senior roles.

Taking into account the results published in Paris on 14th November 2023 at the *Statistics New Release* of OECD we can conclude that the youth unemployment rate remained close to or above 20% in 9 OECD countries in September and increased in 16. Pronounced increases of more than one percentage point were recorded in Korea, Czechia, Luxembourg, and Sweden. And this problem could continue to be exacerbated if specific positions are not opened up for young people who, after finishing school or even university, need to look for a job.

In response to the evolving landscape of the workforce, and as recognition for the need for talent development, this proposal recommends the introduction of fair, junior paid positions within public institutions. The objectives are to provide valuable entry-level opportunities, foster diversity and inclusion, and enhance institutional capacity by ensuring constant renovation and incoming of fresh ideas.

6.2. Proposal

When looking for a job in public institutions, one of the main challenges youth people are faced with is the requirement of years of experience to apply, i.e. around 1 to 3 years of internships. However, these internships are almost always underpaid, most often not paid at all. Therefore, ensuring paid internships in the public sector to young people who wish to gain experience constitutes the first step of the proposal.

Secondly, we want to implement Youth Quotas for open positions in public institutions. We suggest public institutions establish a minimum of 5-10% of young individuals in each of their departments.

6.3. Impact

There are currently 1.2 billion young people between the ages of 15 and 24, which represents 16% of the world's population. By 2030, this number is expected to have reached 1.3 billion. Given that prediction, the implementation of public positions available to the youth will undoubtedly have a major impact on a social, financial and motivational plane. The positive consequences to having open junior positions, can be described as it follows:

- **Workforce Development:** Junior positions provide an avenue that ensures financial stability, which, in time, allows for workforce development and talent cultivation. By offering entry-level positions, public institutions will actively contribute to the development of a skilled and diverse workforce, helping individuals gain practical experience and skills relevant to their chosen field.
- **Opportunities for Recent Graduates:** Public institutions often serve as a stepping stone for recent graduates entering the working field. These junior positions can be particularly attractive to individuals who have completed their education and are eager to apply their valuable academic knowledge in a real-world setting.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Junior positions can contribute to diversity and inclusion initiatives within public institutions. By providing opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds and experiences, organisations can foster a more inclusive work environment and bring a variety of perspectives to their teams.
- **Innovation and Fresh Perspectives:** Junior positions can inject new ideas and fresh perspectives into public institutions. Young professionals often bring innovative approaches to problem-solving and introduce modern technologies and methodologies to the workplace.
- **Adaptability to Change:** Public institutions that actively hire junior employees display adaptability to changing work environments. This competence is crucial in the face of evolving technological landscapes, societal needs, and organisational goals.
- **Community Impact:** Public institutions play a crucial role in serving communities, and having junior positions may enhance the institution's ability to connect with and understand the needs of the community. Young professionals may bring a fresh perspective on how to address community challenges and improve services.

7. “Dear Mayor” Program

7.1 Challenge

The challenge in democratic culture in education lies in bridging the gap between current democratic practices and the active, inclusive participation necessary for a thriving democratic society. Democratic culture extends beyond mere election participation, encompassing dialogues, decision-making, and societal actions. However, it faces degradation due to diminishing trust in democracy, particularly evident in the European Union, and a disconnection between politics and everyday life. We see this with the growing euroscepticism in the EU, which arose from 17% in the 70s to 29% in 2014 (DeSilver, 2019). This degradation is a multifaceted issue, necessitating a long-term, incremental approach that considers the renewal of generations.

Key to addressing this challenge is political education for children, which currently shows significant disparities across countries. In regions with inadequate political curriculum, children grow up ill-equipped to understand and engage in democratic processes, exacerbating the gap in active civic participation. In proposal 3, the need for a transversal political education across regions is stated, but how do we enact such curriculum while avoiding potential controversies regarding indoctrination?

7.2 Proposal

We suggest a pedagogical resource to discuss political topics of interest for students, choose an issue of their interest, explore its political dimensions, and write a call-to-action letter to the relevant authority under the guidance of a teacher or facilitator.

Children are expected to acquire the necessary tools to engage in direct relations with relevant institutions and to be empowered to advocate for their needs and ideas. To enable such a process, some institutions also need to be cooperative, especially the local authorities such as municipalities and regional governments, to give an adequate response while acknowledging that results at higher levels are less probable.

Target groups and involved stakeholders

At the forefront of this proposal are the students themselves, aged between 8 and 15 years old, whose educational experiences are the vital point of any meaningful change. The proposal also directly involves teachers, as well as school administrations tasked with implementing and managing educational initiatives. Furthermore, the engagement of municipal authorities is crucial, as they play a pivotal role in facilitating and supporting educational programs at the local level. Ministries of Education hold a central position in overseeing and coordinating broader educational policies, ensuring alignment with national objectives.

7.3 Impact

Anticipated outcomes of this proposal are expected to have a transformative impact across multiple dimensions of the educational landscape. Foremost, the students within the age bracket of 8-15 years are anticipated to experience enhanced learning experiences, promoting not only academic growth but also the development of critical life skills. At the institutional level, schools are projected to become hubs of dynamic and inclusive education, promoting a positive and collaborative learning environment. Municipalities, through their involvement, can expect to see heightened community engagement and improved educational infrastructure. Ministries of Education, as overseers, may observe positive shifts in national educational statistical indicators, reflecting the success of a more student-centric and holistic approach. Ultimately, the expected impact spans from individual student achievements to broader societal advancements, establishing a foundation for a more vibrant and resilient educational system.

8. Citizen Mail Website

8.1 Challenge

There are different challenges which create obstacles for a citizens to have a broad knowledge and information about establishment and sustainability of democracy, the most important ones of which are:

- Lack of knowledge about democracy,
- Lack of critical thinking,
- Lack of communication between citizens and policy-makers.

Knowledge serves as society's bulwark for democracy. The greater the accessibility to knowledge, the more empowered individuals are to make informed, rational decisions. Consequently, the absence of related knowledge poses a significant obstacle to fostering democratic ideals within society.

In addition to that, lack of critical thinking is another major factor that impacts accountability of people in shaping a democratic society and implementing their democratic rights and freedoms. Critical thinking is about having the courage to challenge what is presented. It is not about being negative. It is about asking why and how repeatedly.

Last, but not least, lack of communication is the matter that has a big challenging impact in fostering democracy. Poor communication between citizens and policy-makers can exacerbate societal divisions and polarizations. Communication for development has thus come to be seen as a way to amplify voice, facilitate meaningful participation, and foster social change.

8.2 Proposal

“Launching a Website with AI Feedback where people can write letters to decision makers”

The website offers various features to bridge the gap between citizens and decision-makers, as well as being supplied with informative support by a trained AI. It will be administered by a third non-government party. Two different interfaces will be available, one for youth and another one for adults as their different needs must be recognized. To enforce that, a personal verification via an official identification document will be required.

With the "Mayor's Mailbox"-function, citizens are given the opportunity to send digital request letters to the city administration for change they want to see in their local community. The mailbox is public where everyone can see the already made requests. Are similar or the same requests given multiple times, an AI collects these and a number under the request will be displayed how often the same request was made. If a certain number is reached, an email will be sent to the responsible administration. Simultaneously, if a request can not be resolved on a local level, feedback will be given by an AI which is explaining the reason to the user and offers ways for redirection of their request. The website is also accessible to parties which would be able to take up citizen proposals. If one political party shows interest, the people who made the request will be notified.

To feel connected with other communities over the world, a digital travel function will be offered as well. This way people can see what are requests and problems in different cities and be inspired. However, they will only be able to send requests to the administration and government of their registered residence.

Additional AI-functions will be used as a democracy question bot which will include knowledge about electoral systems, general definition of democracy and all rights that come with being a citizen of a country. To train critical thinking, as a sustainable skill for users to learn, an AI will offer peer reviewed papers that back and contrast the made requests in the app. This way an opportunity for users to educate themselves on the pros and cons is created.

The website will be accessible to everyone as libraries, schools, community centers will offer access to it as well as every citizen with access to the internet. Furthermore, a possible promotion within election campaigns and in cooperation is possible. With the creation of tutorials on how to use the website which will be published on leaflets, posters and social media as well as video tutorials on youtube, the approachability will be increased.

Later on, the website can be turned into an app to keep active engagement with the public effective.

8.3 Impact

As a result of this proposal, the following matters are aimed to to reach:

- Informed and educated citizens,
- Increased engagement in democratic system,
- Bridging the gap between citizens and policy-makers,
- This will increase trust in political parties and the democratic systems as it creates a direct connection

Through the proposal of “Citizens Mail” Website and its offerings, it's evident that fostering a clear and robust communication channel between citizens and policymakers is essential. This communication allows people to stay informed about ongoing democratic processes, granting them the necessary education to actively follow and engage in these proceedings.

By doing so, it will also impact increasing engagement in democratic systems since this website allows people to write their requests on the special matter and by doing so, they will have an opportunity to engage in circulating and determining specific matters that are crucial parts of democracy building.

Further, this proposal will have a huge impact for bridging the gap between citizens and policy-makers. The citizens will have more opportunity to reach and to make their voices be heard by the governmental bodies, and in turn, they will review and answer the concerns of citizens. By doing so and through this website, the communication gap between them will be erased.

Lastly, all these mentioned points will also have an impact on increasing trust in political parties and their policy towards democracy building. Because, by this proposal, they will have more chances to connect and to be aware of their strategy. As a result, their trust issues in this regard will be mildened.

9. Content Recommendation Regulation

9.1 Challenge

Today, social media is the most used information source for young people. It shapes world perspectives and impacts people's decisions. The algorithms are based on personalization and therefore create polarisation and echo chambers, which are threats to democracy. Because, personalised algorithms may prioritise subjective preferences over objective facts. When users are consistently presented with content tailored to their preferences, it can erode the common understanding of objective truth and shared reality, hindering informed democratic debates.

As such, regulations on content recommendations are crucial to ensure that people have access to information from a broad range of perspectives.

The Internet connects people from all around the world and especially through social media. Regulating social media content is a great opportunity to broaden the perspectives of media users to create a more informed and democratic online community, as well as to prevent further polarisation in society.

9.2 Proposal

We are proposing a new rule that limits the amount of personalised content exposed to social media users. One example is to implement an EU-rule guaranteeing that 5% of all recommended content on platforms like Instagram and Tiktok is not personalised to the specific individual's algorithms. Our initiative aims to expose social media users to content that they would not normally see, in order to promote a broader world-view and different perspectives.

Therefore, we suggest having a structure that promotes democracy itself while keeping the information flow interesting, helpful and beneficial for users.

9.3 Impact

The proposed initiative, considering the use of social media among young people, has the potential to yield a range of positive impacts.

First of all, the implementation of algorithm regulations can prioritise diverse and reliable content since it will provide unbiased information, factual content, and diverse viewpoints on political matters. This can help citizens make more informed decisions based on a broader understanding of various perspectives. By doing so, they will be able to think more broadly before deciding whether to relate to a particular campaign or group of people.

Further, these non-personalized social media contents can raise awareness about important civic issues, government policies, and rights. They provide educational content that informs citizens about their roles, responsibilities, and the impact of their participation on the democratic system.

Next, by disseminating accurate information and countering false narratives, non-personalized social media contents contribute to combating misinformation and disinformation, strengthening the integrity of democratic processes.

Finally, non-personalized content can stimulate critical thinking by encouraging users to evaluate information objectively rather than relying on content tailored to their pre-existing beliefs. It promotes a culture of questioning and analysing various viewpoints.

10. *DemocracyLive* - A policy tracking app

10.1. Challenge

In most democracies, where the population of a nation will vote once every 4-5 years for a leader of the state, there is unfortunately often a lack of further involvement. This can result in populations feeling as though their voices are hardly being heard and consequently, not being represented.

Part of this problem lies in the fact that information regarding the development of policies indirectly chosen by citizens through elections is not transparent. The Pew Research centre (2019) for example found that two-thirds of US adults believe that the government unnecessarily withholds information on public policy that they could safely release, which suggests a huge divide between governing bodies and the people that they are supposed to represent.

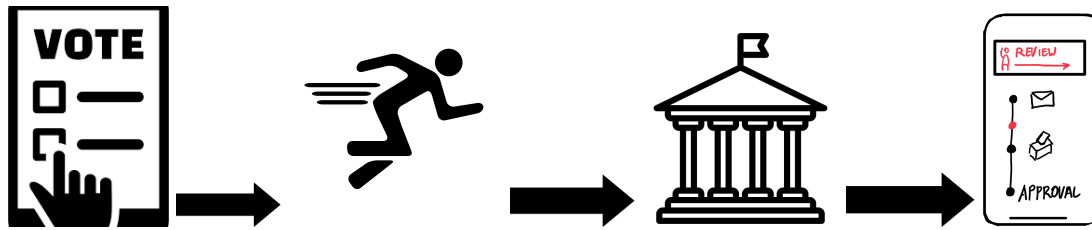
Over recent years especially with the COVID-19 pandemic and the series of enduring economic crises, we have seen governments refuse to take accountability for certain omissions, the ramifications of this are that of a lack in trust in both governments, but also a sentiment that democracy is not working *for* the average person. Governments can also suffer from chronic underperformance where there are absences of robust methods of maintaining accountability (Institute for government, 2018).

This proposal aims to combat these issues by involving civilians in decision making, giving them the power to prevent certain policies from being forgotten about.

10.2 Proposal

We aimed to increase the level of participatory democracy with the development of an app and website that could be used as a tool for governments to receive a greater level of feedback from their populace about the work that they are doing: *DemocracyLive*.

There would be two main features of this app: i) citizen polling and ii) policy tracking. i) Would consist of a periodic poll going out to citizens regarding what specific policies they would like to see prioritised in the political agenda in the upcoming time period. These policies would be fast tracked as an important governmental concern. Following this would come the second stage ii) where the app would give real time updates on the process of the policies that the public have voted on.



10.3 Impacts

The outcome of such a proposal would be a greater public engagement, which is realised through the fast tracking of citizens' priorities. The participation of the public would enhance an active and more involved democratic process that can align the actual needs of the communities with policies adopted by decision makers at different levels of government.

A platform as the one described above would also encourage transparency of institutions, making sure that they pursue the best interest of the community and act on welfare programmes. Efficacy and accountability of policy-making are one of the main focuses of the proposal, directed both to parties and democratic bodies.

11. Public Sector Hackathons

11.1 Challenge

A primary challenge is the often-observed disconnection between public sector entities and the citizens they are meant to serve. This gap leads to a lack of understanding of citizens' needs and aspirations, resulting in policies and services that may not effectively address the real issues faced by the community. Another significant challenge is the tendency within the public sector to work in silos. Different departments and agencies often operate independently, without sufficient collaboration or communication. This approach hinders the development of comprehensive, creative solutions to societal challenges, as it fails to leverage the diverse perspectives and expertise available within the public sector and reduces the servants' capacity to feel empowered within their role.

Furthermore, there is an underutilization of the knowledge and experience of public servants. These individuals, who are often acutely aware of the system's shortcomings, are not systematically engaged in reforming or improving political processes. Their insights could be invaluable in developing more effective, citizen-centric policies and services, and embody their double role as servants and citizens, yet they frequently encounter resistance when proposing novel solutions.

11.2 Proposal

Co-creation is a method to think about challenges and their respective potential solutions by ascertaining the collective intelligence to get creative ideas and enable dealing with complex issues. Implementing co-creation among civil servants can significantly enhance the performance and consensus in public administrations. This approach involves engaging workers at various levels in third-party facilitated workshops to actively participate in the development of policies, processes, and services in structured but creative approaches. By doing so, it harnesses their diverse expertise, experiences, and perspectives, leading to potentially more innovative and effective solutions. Co-creation encourages a culture of teamwork and open communication, breaking down silos within departments and fostering a more collaborative environment, while optimising efforts. This not only improves internal operations but also boosts morale and job satisfaction among employees. Additionally, involving civil servants in co-creation processes helps align public services more closely with the needs and expectations of citizens, leading to greater public trust and satisfaction. Through regular feedback loops and participatory decision-making, administrations can become more responsive and adaptive, effectively addressing the evolving challenges of public governance.

We propose to hold a third-party facilitated workshops within the public administration context where public servants from the different departments come to discuss and generate ideas for a societal issue or challenge. This exercise is meant as a break from the “routine” in favour of more creative dynamics where new forms of collaborations and novel proposals can be made. Such events would happen on a periodic basis (i.e. once or twice a year), and could potentially involve various stakeholders. Having multiple stakeholders is essential to ensure potential collaborations and binding agreements can be made among parties. While this can reduce tokenism, it is also necessary for facilitations to establish clear boundaries of possibility (which might be discussed and pushed) to safeguard the risk of unmet expectations and demands both by the administration structure (politicians, servants, legislation or budgeting) and other involved stakeholders.

We specifically target the public sector employees, such as civil servants and bureaucrats. By targeting this specific group often regarded as desensitised from the general citizenry, we seek to foster political engagement by a previously underrepresented component of society and the public administration. However, other stakeholders include the representatives of either the Private Sector or an NGO which would seek to moderate and facilitate the discussion and proposal of ideas. Additionally, various Labour Unions would play an integral role in discussing the solutions and their implementation. Lastly, the political structures of the jurisdiction are stakeholders as this is whom the proposals would ultimately intend to influence.

11.3 Impact

The proposed approach of implementing co-creation within the public administration has the potential to significantly impact the fostering of a democratic culture. By engaging civil servants in third-party facilitated workshops, the initiative promotes collaboration, creativity, and active participation in the development of policies and services. This not only enhances the efficiency and consensus within public administrations but also cultivates a culture of teamwork and open communication. Breaking down departmental silos and harnessing diverse perspectives leads to more innovative solutions, improving internal operations and boosting employee morale. The inclusion of various stakeholders, such as private sector representatives, NGOs, labor unions, and political structures, ensures a well-rounded discussion and the formulation of proposals that align closely with the needs and expectations of citizens. Through periodic events and participatory decision-making, the proposal aims to create a more responsive and adaptive public governance system, ultimately contributing to greater public trust and satisfaction.

12. Democratic World Café

12.1 Challenge

The challenge in democratic culture within private companies centres on reconciling the inherent tension between maintaining an apolitical stance and acknowledging the political interests of both employers and employees. This dynamic is further complicated by the influence of lobbying and the varying personal values of individuals within the company. Companies, especially large multinationals, often invest significant resources in lobbying, which can create a disconnect between the company's practices and the democratic ideals of its workforce.

The challenge extends to how these companies navigate their role in society, balancing economic goals with social responsibilities. As employees, particularly younger generations, increasingly seek to work for organisations that align with their individual values, companies are confronted with the task of integrating these values into their corporate culture. This shift represents both a challenge and an opportunity to embed democratic values into every sphere of corporate life.

12.2 Proposal

The Private Sector is often considered apolitical or very averse to any engagement related to political issues. From our perspective, political engagement is seen as a way to foster idea facilitation, civic involvement and feeling of civic responsibility, contrary to a common perception of political engagement as an indoctrination of commonly expected views and opinions. Therefore, allowing for political engagement in the political sector is crucial, as changing existing undemocratic norms is necessary in order to permit the emergence of an all-encompassing democratic culture.

As the title of the proposal signifies, the methodology of the “World Café” will be implemented. The World Café methodology is a collaborative and participatory approach to group discussions and idea generation. It involves participants moving between small, informal group settings to discuss a central topic or question, with each group being moderated by an individual from a third party, such as a facilitator from either the Public Sector or an Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Each group contributes insights and ideas, and participants switch groups periodically, building upon previous discussions. The process encourages diverse perspectives, fosters open dialogue, and promotes the exploration of a topic from various angles, leading to a rich exchange of ideas and collective knowledge. All the participants subsequently assemble, which is followed by the presentation and discussion of all the different proposals, followed by discussion, assessment and implementation.

However, this interdepartmental approach is only applicable when cooperating with larger enterprises. Therefore, we have developed another approach with the implementation of

the World Café within Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs). Instead of inviting workers from different departments within the same enterprise, we would seek to bring together workers from different enterprises, ideally from the same sectors (e.g agricultural, retail ...), or with different SMEs located within the same geographical district. This would allow the World Café to be implemented for all sizes of enterprises, not only being reserved for those large enough to encompass several differing departments.

To eliminate the possibility of fears arising on the side of the Private Sector participants, we form the participating groups by inviting members from different departments presented in a company. If people from different departments with varying scope of responsibilities and backgrounds gather together to engage in specific problem-solving activities, the participants are expected to feel freer to share specific opinions on a certain topic. We encourage a non-violent communication approach to further eliminate any potential interpersonal conflicts and fears stemming from reprisals from workers higher up the hierarchy.

The target group for the Democratic World Café for the Private Sector would be both SMEs and larger companies, with the methodology being scalable, grounded and executable on several different types of enterprises. Even so, the proposal involves several different stakeholders. Clearly, the enterprises themselves play a crucial role in addition to the employees, but the facilitators of the World Café should be either from the Public Sector or an NGO unaffiliated to the enterprise(s) in question.

12.3 Impact

The private sector is often perceived as detached from the society politically and socially. Our expectation is that the innovative tool suggested will promote political engagement among the private sector employees. Several studies also show that employees who feel satisfied, engaged and perceive that they play an integral role in shaping the environment around them perform better and act as more innovative stakeholders (Christen et al., 2006), hence acting as a positive influence for economic development and innovation.

Conclusion

With these 12 proposals, we aspire to catalyse readers, urging them to take a decisive step forward in persistently forging a path for democracy. They will be incorporated into the overarching “Handbook for Innovative Democracy” to improve democratic society. This third edition captures the combined effort of 24 young people coming from 12 different countries challenging rising antidemocratic sentiment.

Considering that active citizens build the foundation of a democratic community, we propose innovative ideas for overcoming barriers to engage in democracy. Through inclusion, access to learning and opportunities for participation, we want to foster an environment in which citizens feel encouraged to engage on a local, national and global level.

The proposed solutions tackle the underrepresentation of youth and minority groups through electoral quotas, junior positions, reforming voting mechanisms and theoretical as well as practical political education. This encompasses spaces in public and private spheres to foster political engagement for citizens of all ages.

To include the concerns of an emerging digital society we want to inspire a new outlook towards content recommendation regulations as well as propose an innovative website that familiarises and instrumentalizes Artificial Intelligence in democratic discourse. To foster institutional accountability, further proposals provide citizens with tools to track democratic processes up to a global level and ensure adherence to human rights. All proposals are based on providing citizens with instruments from a young age to engage and keep being involved in democracy.

We hope this is the first step in taking the right path towards an inclusive and peaceful democracy and we invite you to join us!

As we conclude this report, shaping a future where democracy thrives on inclusivity and participation, we invite you to actively partake in shaping this vision. Let us embark together on the journey towards a healthy democracy – your engagement is the catalyst for meaningful change.

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