

# 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 institutions – 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*, *Community Engagement* and *Workplace*. Proposal by proposal, we offer the opportunity for every societal actor to be a leading advocate for change.

*Democratic Foundations* include ground proposals that point to the core of democratic processes. Frequently, anti-democratic forces exploit the weaknesses of the system to seize or maintain power and suppress potential opposition. For improvement to be effective, we first need to establish a strong democratic basis 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. Youth quotas and junior positions help 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 to channel the potential of technology within the proposals.

*Workplace* encourages public and private employees to engage in politics. 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 Challenge

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 could be argued as 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. Human rights are also a 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 adopt 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 Impact**

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 would be 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.

Needless to say that 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 Challenge

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 this is leading to assumptions being made at times. The population has a large amount of unique lived experience. Consequently, those with valuable experiences but no political experience are being left out of key decisions.

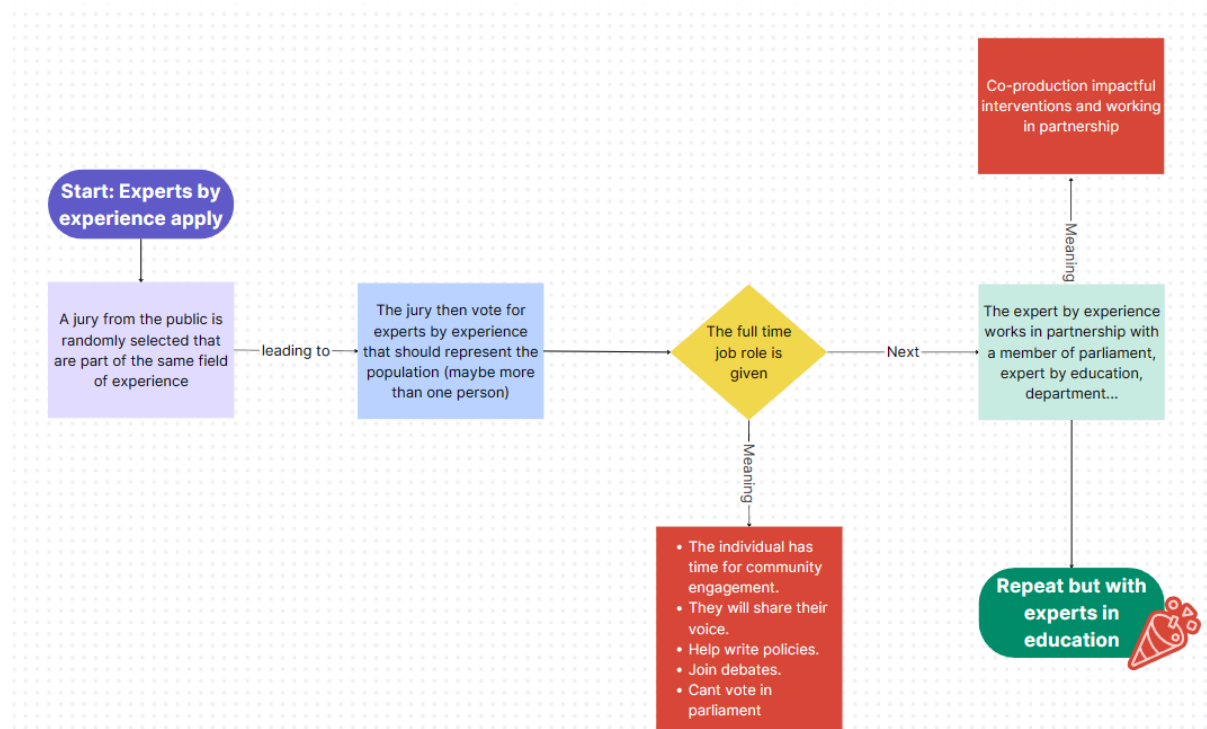
### 2.2 Proposal

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

We begin with two key definitions:

- 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 by education of the education system.

The process (see diagram below):



A job role would be advertised 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 with lived experience of mental health services or an unemployed individual. Applications would then be received and collected.

A jury would then be collected from the public through a random selection process. 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 Impact**

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 Challenge

The world is home to 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10-24 – the largest generation of youth in history<sup>1</sup>. 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<sup>2</sup>. According to data from the OECD, in 2020, only 22% of members of parliaments (MPs) were under the age of 40<sup>3</sup>. 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<sup>4</sup>.

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 disengagement and 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

We propose the implementation of youth quotas in Parliaments as a way to improve youth representation 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. 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. In European and Western countries, the ageing demographics further reinforce the need for young representation. As the population

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations. "Youth in Action." <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/youth-in-action> (November 22, 2023).

<sup>2</sup> Stockemer, Daniel, and Aksel Sundström. 2023. "Age Inequalities in Political Representation: A Review Article." *Government and Opposition*: 1–18. doi: 10.1017/gov.2023.11.

<sup>3</sup> Joerg Chet Tremmel, 2006. "Establishing intergenerational justice in national constitutions," Chapters, in: Joerg Chet Tremmel (ed.), *Handbook of Intergenerational Justice*, chapter 10, Edward Elgar Publishing. [https://ideas.repec.org/h/elg/eechap/4218\\_10.html](https://ideas.repec.org/h/elg/eechap/4218_10.html)

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2021), *Government at a Glance 2021*, Chapter in: Youth representation in politics. OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c258f55-en>.



ages, older generations hold more political power for the simple fact that they are more numerous. Nonetheless, Youth Quotas should not be applied only in countries with ageing populations, since inclusion of the youth in the decision making process must be guaranteed independently of the demographics of the country or territory.

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<sup>5</sup>. To build upon this proposal we suggest three 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<sup>6</sup>.
- **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<sup>7</sup> (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

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<sup>5</sup> Jana Belschner (2021) The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings, *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 9:1, 151-169, DOI: [10.1080/21565503.2018.1528163](https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1528163)

<sup>6</sup> ACE project. “Youth and Elections.” <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt20/quotas-for-youth> (November 22, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Jana Belschner (2021) The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings, *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 9:1, 151-169, DOI: [10.1080/21565503.2018.1528163](https://doi.org/10.1080/21565503.2018.1528163)

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 –we will come back to this topic when discussing the Education of Young Voters and Lowering the Voting Age to 16– 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. Additionally, 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 relating to the implementation of Youth Quotas. This department would act as a reference for states seeking guidance on how to avoid tokenism in their Youth Quotas.

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 that ensures their voice is always taken into account. Not only that, it also acts as an awakening call to tackle pressing issues that especially affect the youth, and 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 ageing 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 in elections and knowledge about 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. Without such, an inherent disinterest in democracy is created. Trust in the democratic process, elections and the fairness of democracy could be at risk as the structures we know them as.

### 4.2 Proposal

Considering the above-mentioned challenge, we suggest holding separate junior elections at every general election. Junior elections will be a separately held election for everyone between six and the legal voting age. The idea is to simulate the election process from a young age. Prior to national elections, adults normally receive a letter with instructions and an invitation to vote. Our proposal suggests that citizens under the legal voting age will receive invitations as well, except it will be to vote in the Junior Election. This letter contains detailed educational material on the voting process in a language appropriate for different age groups. Therefore, it will be possible for every age group to achieve a basic understanding of the electoral process and the power of voting. The Junior elections will be held on the same day as the actual elections. Children will be able to visit the polling station alongside their legal guardians. They will have the opportunity to fill out the same ballot as them in a voting booth. The votes of the junior elections will be collected in a separate ballot box and will be counted at the end of election day. While the votes have no actual impact on the election results, the votes will be analysed and proclaimed in national media. The voices of youth will be represented in public and discussed, which will shape the public discourse.

The first foundational thesis for this proposal is that voting is a habit. The earlier the habit of voting is learned, the more likely it is that children 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 will be taken a step further by implementing this proposal.

The second thesis is that this habit can be best learned by observing others do it (observational learning). However, most children are not introduced to the democratic system by their legal guardian, since oftentimes, when citizens can vote for the first time (between 18 and 22), they don't live with them any more. Since political education is not on the curriculum in most European countries, legal guardians are one of the most important conveyors for kids and children to learn about democracy.

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.

### 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, which will create long-lasting positive associations with the political system and therefore strengthen the democracy in itself.

It is very likely that junior elections will increase voter turnout in the long run as various psychological studies on habit building prove.

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 and complement political education in school.

The impact will be double-sided: Children are getting encouraged to vote by their legal guardians at a young age, which will possibly lead to traditions or common habit. In other situations where legal guardians don't vote, children will motivate their guardians to go to the polling station with them, because they want to take part in the junior election. This will help build sustainable structures of active participation in democracy in every age group. With Junior Elections, democracy and voting will be made more accessible and understandable for a significant part of citizens as families will learn alongside their children about the system, options and the impact of voting.

The growing understanding of the democratic system provided with this proposal will enable citizens to learn about politics independently of the education system and eliminate barriers as educational material will be provided in different versions (e.g. simple language for different age groups or other minority languages). Within a long-term perspective, higher election turnouts are to be expected as a result of the implementation of this proposal.

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" and copy habits of the surrounding adults. So let's take that chance to let them understand democracy at an early age. As things that captivate us early can often continue to hold a special place in our hearts as we age.

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

### 5.1 Challenge

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

Actively encouraging the development of the youth's critical thinking regarding politics is still a challenge in many countries around the world. Along with this measure, we propose the lowering of the voting age to 16 years. In many countries the voting age comes years after reaching the working, driving and criminal responsibility age. If 16-year-olds are mature enough to pay taxes, why are they not considered mature enough to vote and decide what those taxes are used for?

### 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 and organise themselves in assemblies or school parliaments. Proposal #4 is an excellent example of how to introduce hands-on experience on the voting system to the younger segments of society, to get them involved in the democratic process early on in their life. 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. It is essential to equip them with the necessary knowledge to comprehend the functioning of the government system

in their country, as well as the impact of their participation in it. General knowledge about the most commonly used government systems around the world should also be included in the curriculum to achieve a global understanding of the matter.

- **Lowering the voting age:** Once provided with political education, young minds can turn their values and motivation into action to change the status quo. Thus, we can proceed to the next step: lowering the voting age to 16 in all types of elections, 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 bottom-up 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, an impartial and useful education regarding the political system of the country must be implemented . 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.

Lowering the voting age is a measure for fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy. 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.

Extending the right to vote to a broader age demographic empowers young people to directly influence policies that impact them but also instils 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 youth voter turnout and representation. Hence, they may be more likely to vote.

## 6. Public Positions for Youth

### 6.1 Challenge

Junior, public 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, as they develop a pool of skilled individuals who can eventually take on 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 junior, fairly-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

- **Youth Quotas in Public institutions:** 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.
- **Fair payment:** when looking for a job in public institutions, one of the main challenges young 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.

### 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.

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

Knowledge serves as an important pillar 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. The most important obstacles can be surmised as the following:

- Lack of knowledge about democracy,
- Lack of understanding of the democratic system,
- Lack of communication between citizens and policy-makers.

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

The launching of a website with AI feedback where people can write letters to decision makers is the core of this proposal. 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. The proposal is a great addition to the “Dear Mayor”-program, as it offers digital tools to tackle the same challenges.

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. The AI will be able to offer information in a simplified or more complex manner. To train critical thinking, the AI will offer a variety of newspaper articles, social media posts and books when asked a question. This way an opportunity for users to educate themselves on the pros and cons is created as well as gain critical thinking in context of media usage online and question ordinary headlines and statement posts made online.

The website will be accessible to everyone as libraries, schools, community centres 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 reach:

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

Through the proposal of “Citizen 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 knowledge to actively follow and engage in these proceedings, as well as taking the chance to actively shape it themselves.

The public engagement in the democratic system will be simplified and more accessible as citizens are able to support circulating requests or writing a proposal on a specific

matter important to them. These are crucial parts of building a trusted and people-lead democracy.

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 tempered.

## 9. Content Recommendation Regulation

### 9.1 Challenge

Nowadays, social media is the most used information source for most people. The Internet connects people from all around the world and especially through social media. It shapes world perspectives and impacts people's decisions in their real life.

The algorithms are based on personalization and therefore create polarisation and echo chambers, which are a threat to healthy participation and perception of democracy. 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.

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.

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

### 9.2 Proposal

We are proposing the adoption of binding regulations limiting personalised content exposed to social media users. A first step would be to implement an EU-policy guaranteeing that 5% of all recommended content on platforms like Instagram and Tiktok is not personalised to the specific individual's algorithms. Following that, a global implementation is the goal. 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.

In the context of the European Union, we suggest the implementation and the supervision of our proposal will be organised by either the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communication or the Board of Digital Services. This will be the first step of a global implementation, as the European Union is the biggest common market. The second step, in a global context, would include the creation of a supervisory body entrusted with safeguarding the internet from polarising discourse and practices by guaranteeing a minimum level of pluralism on the web. A methodology for the supervision will be developed and used as a measurement. A possible model would be a global index which would rate the amount of non-personalized content shown on the platform to each individual. The higher the amount of non-personalised content, the higher the score. This could be comparable to the Nutri-score index, which helps individuals make better informed decisions.

### **9.3 Impact**

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

Firstly, 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-personalised social media contents contribute to combating misinformation and disinformation, strengthening the integrity of democratic processes. Our proposal is an addition to already existing policy proposals combating false information online around the world.

Finally, non-personalized content can stimulate critical thinking by encouraging users to compare information from different sources rather than relying on content tailored to their pre-existing beliefs. It promotes a culture of critical thinking and broadening the perspectives of individuals.



# 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 elected representatives in local, regional, and national assemblies, 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.

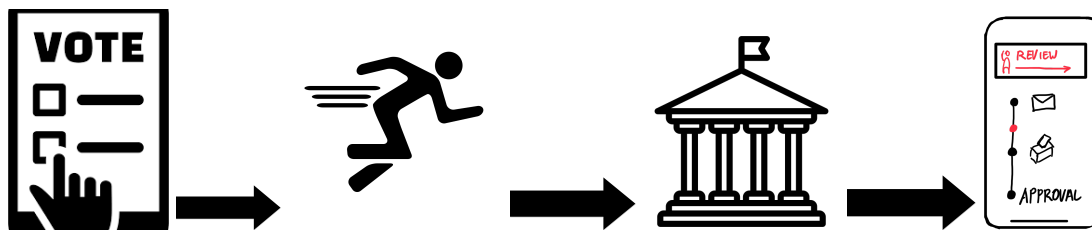
This proposal aims to combat these issues by involving civilians in decision making, giving them the power to prevent certain policies from being forgotten about.

## 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:

1) citizen polling which 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 period. These policies would be fast tracked as an important governmental concern; and

2) policy tracking, a stage where the app would provide real time updates on the adoption, implementation, or improvement process of the policies that the citizenry has 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.

The app aspires to create a lasting impact on the awareness of the citizenry, empowering them to access high-quality information pertaining to government systems and policy matters. 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. The civil servants, 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 civil servants and conscious citizens who have enhanced access to the knowledge related to the government systems and how it operates and serves the society. However, the bureaucrats frequently encounter resistance as to proposing novel solutions and implementing individual ideas or suggestions.

## 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.

Our primary focus is on engaging public sector employees, including civil servants and bureaucrats. By directing our efforts toward this group, often perceived as somewhat detached from the general citizenry, we aim to stimulate political engagement in a segment of society and public administration that has been historically underrepresented. However, our outreach extends to other essential stakeholders, such as representatives from the private sector or NGOs, who facilitate and moderate discussions, contributing diverse perspectives and ideas. In addition, labour unions play a crucial role in deliberating on solutions and their practical implementation. Lastly, political structures within the jurisdiction are key stakeholders, as the proposals ultimately intend to influence and shape their decision-making processes.

### **11.3 Impact**

The proposed approach to implementing co-creation within public administration holds the potential for a profound impact on fostering a democratic culture. It targets both bureaucrats and citizens, showcasing how the public sector collaborates to address societal issues. Involving civil servants in facilitated workshops encourages collaboration, creativity, and active participation in policy and service development. This not only boosts efficiency and consensus within administrations but also nurtures a culture of teamwork and open communication. The initiative also seeks to inspire citizens to engage more actively in public sector processes. By establishing an accessible collaborative workstream among civil servants and engaging citizens simultaneously, it encourages public involvement. Breaking down departmental silos and incorporating diverse perspectives results in more innovative solutions, enhancing internal operations and boosting employee morale.

Inclusivity is further emphasised by involving various stakeholders, such as private sector representatives, NGOs, labour unions, and political structures. This ensures a comprehensive discussion and the formulation of proposals closely aligned with citizens' needs. Through periodic events and participatory decision-making, the proposal aims to create a more responsive and adaptive public governance system, ultimately fostering greater public trust and enhancing citizen satisfaction.

## 12. Democratic World Café

### 12.1 Challenge

The challenge in fostering a democratic culture within private companies revolves around reconciling the inherent tension between maintaining an apolitical stance and acknowledging the political interests of both employers and employees. This complexity is heightened by the influence of lobbying and the diverse personal values held by individuals within the company. Particularly in large multinationals, significant resources are often invested in lobbying, creating a potential misalignment between the company's practices and the democratic ideals of its workforce. Engagement in direct civic activities, especially political aspects, is typically limited in the private sector.

This challenge extends to how companies navigate their role in society, balancing economic goals with social responsibilities. As employees, particularly the younger generations, seek organisations aligned with their values, companies must integrate these values into their corporate culture. Presently, companies of all sizes are incorporating Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activities, such as organising marathons, offering workshops, or allowing employees to donate bonuses to societal causes. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity to embed democratic values into every facet of corporate life. As the corporate landscape evolves, addressing these challenges will be crucial for companies to build trust, attract talent, and contribute positively to societal well-being.

### 12.2 Proposal

The Private Sector is often viewed as apolitical or relatively hesitant to engage with political issues. Contrary to the common perception of political engagement as indoctrination, from our perspective, it serves as a means to foster idea facilitation, civic involvement, and a sense of civic responsibility. Recognizing political engagement as a positive force is crucial, challenging existing undemocratic norms and paving the way for the emergence of a comprehensive democratic culture. By encouraging political engagement within the private sector, we aim to reshape perceptions and contribute to the development of a corporate environment that values diverse perspectives, active civic participation, and a commitment to democratic principles.

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 a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), the trusted parties or entities that sign a data protection agreement and agree on the collaboration terms before proceeding to actual endeavours. There has been an increased trend of involving public,

non-governmental and private in joint endeavours, such as charity projects or wide-scale CSR-related opportunities, and offering an official platform for those parties to collaborate on democratic issues is an opportunity to add value to already-existing partnerships. 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**

Given the common perception of the private sector as politically and socially disconnected from society, our expectation is that the proposed innovative tool will foster political engagement among employees. Existing studies affirm that satisfied, engaged employees who feel integral to shaping their environment tend to perform better and act as innovative stakeholders (Christen et al., 2006), thereby positively influencing economic development and innovation.

Moreover, the introduction of Democratic World Cafés enhances the appeal of private sector employers to younger generations deeply committed to societal causes and eager to address longstanding challenges. Recognizing the private sector's role in promoting democratic thinking both within and beyond the workplace can inspire young individuals to sustain their societal engagements as they embark on their full-time careers.

Finally, the proposal addresses a crucial aspect of mental health care, acknowledging the impact of societal issues on well-being. Providing employees with the opportunity to discuss individual and societal concerns in the workplace offers a release valve for tension. It reinforces the idea that the workplace cares about the world as much as the individual employee does, fostering a sense of collective concern for the broader community.

## Conclusion

With these 12 proposals, we encourage readers to take a decisive step forward in persistently forging a path for democracy. The proposals – a combined effort of 24 young people from 12 different countries to challenge anti democratic sentiment – will be incorporated into the third edition of the IYTT Handbook for Innovative Democracy.

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

A key tenet across the proposed solutions is providing citizens with instruments from a young age to engage and continue being involved in democracy. One of the focuses is to cultivate political engagement for citizens of all ages, in both public and private spheres. Specific to the underrepresentation of youth and minority groups, we suggest electoral quotas, junior positions, reforming voting mechanisms and theoretical as well as practical political education.

To include the concerns of an emerging digital society we inspire a new outlook towards content recommendation regulations as well as propose an innovative website that instrumentalises 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.

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 – envisioning 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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