

Committee: Youth Assembly

Issue: Youth Political Activism

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INTRODUCTION

We find ourselves in an age where we predominantly surround ourselves with activist media. Due to technological advancements, social media, search engines, and other social platforms have been developed, which have resulted in today's youth gaining access to resources they previously lacked, and therefore, more young people are actively participating in current political discussions. Despite that, a large number of young people are often marginalized from politics, as adults think they lack the knowledge to participate.

Being excluded from parliamentary decision-making in such ways, the young may end up feeling frustrated, valueless, and idle regarding political progress. It is evident that young people are incredibly active on social media and engaged in issues of global concern.

Why is it of such great importance for today's youth to be included in politics? Modern youth need to be incorporated into political processes and situations, as they bring a new perspective along with innovative ideas and solutions that will enhance development. Furthermore, as young people participate in local as well as international political undertakings, they will be taught skills that they will need as the leaders of the future.

In cases where young people were given opportunities to voice their opinions and concerns and organize political decision-making, they demonstrated their abilities and disposition to encourage and espouse long-lasting positive change. Prime examples were the various climate change advocacies by youth, and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which gained popularity and awareness again due to social media activism. In addition, if young people are included in politics and receive

proper education on social studies and politics, they are more likely to adopt democratic views and generally feel their opinions are being heard.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Youth Population¹

The term youth refers to people aged 15 – 24; however, this range varies depending on the source and situation.

Political Activism²

Political activism refers to civic engagement in political and global issues and can be demonstrated by raising awareness on social media, physical demonstrations, movements, and more. It is the involvement of citizens in pushing for political change.

Youth Political Activism³

Youth Political Activism is when members of the youth population (see term 1) participate in political activism (see term 2).

Political Participation⁴

Political participation includes a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions about the world and how it is governed and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives.

Adult-centrism⁵

Adult-centrism is the potential bias older people may have when engaging in conversation with younger individuals by thinking that the other person is naive and cannot comprehend the subject of the conversation due to their age.

¹ <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth>

² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/political-activism>

³ <https://www.ndi.org/what-we-do/youth-political-participation>

⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/political-participation>

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<https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/10361/adultcentrisminpracticewithchildren.pdf?sequence=1>

Intergenerational Equity⁶

Intergenerational equity is the term used to describe issues of social, financial, and psychological fairness and justice between generations. The concept of intergenerational equity, however, can also apply to equity in interactions/treatment between various age groups.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

What Youth Political Activism Is

The term 'Youth activism' combines various terms into one fairly new and innovative concept. As the name suggests, young people, usually aged 15-24 years old, usually hold and advocate for progressive and alternative views. Such advocacies may include but are not limited to raising awareness, usually through social media, physical demonstrations, or movements. Usually, what urges young people to commit to such activities is the need for safe spaces, whether that be physical (e.g. public parks) or societal (for example the BLM/ March For Our Lives movements). Other issues often include mental and physical health rights, a contemporary example of which is reproductive health rights, environmental issues (i.e. School Strikes for the Climate), as well as gender and LGBTQ inclusivity and visibility.

Historical Youth-Led Activism Movements

Vietnam War Protests

More than two million members of the youth population were drafted into the United States (USA) military during the Vietnam War⁷. It was at that point that youth were at the frontline of protests. The student movement that aided turn the American public against the Vietnam War started in the mid-1960s, with youthful activists inspired by both the civil rights movement⁸ and left-wing opposition from the Cold War. Across the United States, minors led marches and demonstrations,

⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/intergenerational-equity>

⁷ <https://www.history.com/topics/vietnam-war/vietnam-war-history>

⁸ <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/civil-rights-movement#:~:text=The%20civil%20rights%20movement%20was,law%20in%20the%20United%20States.&text=They%2C%20along%20with%20many%20white,equality%20that%20spanned%20two%20decades.>

deeply concerned over the conflict. The fights electrified, agitated, and eventually divided American citizens, who debated whether minors ought to be permitted to demonstrate or not.

The Chicago Seven also played a major role in the Vietnam War Protests. The Chicago Seven were seven suspects—Abbie Hoffman, Jerry Rubin, David Dellinger, Tom Hayden, Rennie Davis, John Froines, and Lee Weiner—charged by the United States federal government with crossing state lines with the aim of prompting a riot, teaching demonstrators how to construct inflammable devices and different charges identified with anti-Vietnam War and nonconformist fights in Chicago, Illinois during the 1968 Democratic National Convention. While the jury deliberated on the Chicago Seven’s case, the defendants and their attorneys were convicted by a judge for contempt of court and were handed down sentences ranging from less than three months to more than four years. These convictions were later reversed on appeal, and some were retried before a different judge. The Chicago Seven is such a big name to this day, that, from the beginning of the trial, the defendants and their attorneys have been represented in a variety of art forms, including film, music, and theater, once again showing the power of people with progressive views supporting what and who they believe in.

At protests such as the one at Kent State University on May 4, 1970, unarmed minors were killed; others were tear-gassed and harassed by the police. Members of harmless groups, Students for a Democratic Society, for example, one of the principal drivers of the anti-war movement, were even targeted by the FBI. All in all, these massive anti-war protests and demonstrations brought attention to the general public’s dissatisfaction with the U.S.A.’s involvement in the Vietnam War.

Tiananmen Square

This event is targeted towards the struggles for democracy in China circa 1989. Millions of Chinese teenagers took to the streets in various Chinese cities demanding the basic rights that US students receive as a birthright of theirs. The Tiananmen Square movement was made internationally known by the fact that the savagery and violence in Tiananmen Square did not simply happen in the plaza itself. It moved through China as young people demanded democratic changes and financial advances notwithstanding cronyism and nationwide economic decline. Countless activists, large numbers of them being college students, rampaged with banners,

speeches, and catchphrases, some even going on violent hunger strikes. On 3rd and 4th June, 1989, the extremely charged protests took an alarming turn when a large number of troops advanced on Tiananmen Square, started shooting at unarmed students, and squashed the demonstration with tanks and rifles. The number of casualties is still unclear, more than 30 years after the incident. China has never authoritatively recognized the events of Tiananmen Square, and to this day monitors data and discussions about the happening. Three decades after the crackdown, professionals investigating the Tiananmen development still fear retaliations from the Chinese Communist Party.

Fridays For Future (School Strike For Climate)

Fridays for Future is a movement both led and organized by young people. The movement began in August of 2018, after 15-year old Greta Thunberg and other young Swedish activists protested in front of the Swedish parliament every Friday for three consecutive weeks, with the aim of raising awareness on the lack of action taken in combating the climate crisis. Once Thunberg shared her activism on social media platforms, the movement soon went viral. Within 7 months, over 14 million people, primarily students, had participated in protests on Fridays marching through town centers. These marches have taken place in over 7,500 cities around the world.

March For Our Lives

March For Our Lives (MFOL) was a student-driven demonstration that took place in Washington, D.C. on March 24, 2018, supporting weapon control legislation. The occasion followed the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School shooting which took place a month earlier and news sources named a potential tipping point for the gun control legislation. Protesters asked for background verifications on all firearm and gun deals, raising the legal gun ownership age to 21, a reinforcement of the 1994 Federal Assault Weapons Ban, as well as a prohibition on the offer of high-capacity magazines and bump stocks in the United States. Turnout was assessed to be somewhere in the range of 1.2 and 2 million people in the United States, making it probably one of the biggest protests in American history.

Reasons Youth Gets Involved

As evident, young people have helped drive social movements around the world for decades. From protesting the established order to furthering new ideas, youth are on the front lines of political and social transformations, intending to make the world a better place. Reasons for youth participation and movements vary.

Firstly, due to the use of social media, constant socialization, and more, young people often have more diverse social networks than most adults. This means that young people nowadays can exchange ideas and opinions on crucial matters with people from all over the world, of various social classes and having undergone several experiences. Furthermore, this is something they are more likely to do than adults with access to social media since young people are much more comfortable with using social media and getting to know people through it. By getting to know new people who have witnessed an event of common political concern, the youth population may sympathize with victims of the situation and advocate for change.

Furthermore, young people are more inclined to use media in innovative ways, seeing that they are much more accustomed to using it in their everyday lives. They may adopt the latest technologies to help spread their message. Not only that, but today's youth also have more time, mental fortitude, physical strength, and bandwidth than older people, giving them a greater chance of taking risks and fighting the unsatisfactory status quo. Altogether, reasons such as these make youth participation in social movements a powerful element.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

United States of America (USA)

The USA has been at the forefront of many youth-led demonstrations over the years. Young people decide to march for both international issues such as the climate change emergency, the BLM movement, and more, but also national issues, such as the March for our Lives, whose main focus was the gun legislation of the US. Furthermore, though marches and demonstrations are allowed by the first amendment as a part of the freedom of assembly ("Amendment I: Congress shall make no law ... abridging ... the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to

petition the Government for a redress of grievances.")⁹, often peaceful protests end up with police/public forces being violent against (usually young) protesters. Due to that, the implementation of so-called 'free speech zones' is a growing trend in the US. Such zones are fenced-in areas that are often far away from the actual event which is being protested.

United Kingdom (UK)

Under the Serious Organized Crime and Police Act 2005 and the Terrorism Act 2006, there are areas named 'protected sites' in which people are not permitted to go. In the past, these had been military bases and nuclear power stations, yet the law is starting to include other more urban and political regions, like Downing Street, the Palace of Westminster, and the headquarters of MI5 and MI6 (UK Secret Intelligence Services). Beforehand, trespassers could not be arrested, seeing that they had not perpetrated another crime and consented to being escorted out. Human Rights groups dread the forces that could impede peaceful protests by branching out the Serious Organized Crime and Police Act 2005 and the Terrorism Act 2006. A local civil liberties group, 'Liberty', said the actions were "excessive".

Furthermore, on 19 October 2019, one of the largest demonstrations in the UK was the 'People Vote March', whose goal was to campaign for a second referendum following the UK's Brexit vote, with around 1 million demonstrators in attendance. The Black Lives Matter movement was also very large in the UK; the widespread protests that called for greater racial equality eventually led Boris Johnson, the British prime minister, to launch a commission that would investigate systemic racism in the UK. The BLM movement in London also was of great importance, especially after the attack of activist Sasha Johnson. 27-year-old Sasha Johnson rose to national prominence all over the UK, when she was attacked and shot in the head in a backyard in South-East London after receiving numerous death threats. Thankfully, the shot was not fatal, but a year later, Sasha Johnson is still fighting for her life, having sustained a serious injury.

Nigeria

On 20th October, Nigerian security forces started shooting at two gatherings of unarmed demonstrators in the rambling city of Lagos, killing twelve individuals.

⁹ <https://constitution.congress.gov/constitution/amendment-1/>

The casualties had been part of the #EndSARS peaceful protest, a week-long uprising in Lagos, demanding greater responsibility from law enforcement and attempting to put an end to widespread police brutality in Nigeria. SARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) was a Nigerian Police Force formed in 1992 in order to combat armed robbery. Unfortunately, however, SARS continuously tortured and committed various forms of ill-treatment to extract information, punish and even execute suspects. After the homicides of those twelve people, a few states, including Lagos, imposed curfews due to large amounts of violence and pockets of unrest, the majority of those targeting peaceful protesters. Hence, the bloodshed and violence drove The Feminist Coalition, the gathering of youthful Nigerian women's rights activists that took part in the protests, to declare it will not be accepting donations toward the #EndSARS movement, encouraging young Nigerians to stay safe at home, applying the mandated curfew in their state.

Youth Activism Project (YAP)

The Youth Activism Project is a non-profit organization, whose main objective is to teach teenagers organizing and movement-building abilities so that they will be able and empowered to make a political impact on all government forms. Additionally, they standardize, destigmatize, and therefore promote youth activism. Not only that, but the YAP encourages international campaigns organized by youth that recognize issues and conflicts with local officials (for example school board members), older generation communities, as well as elected officials, and, of course, come up with solutions.

United Nations Youth Associations (UNYAs)

United Nations Youth Associations (UNYAs) are youth-driven non-governmental organizations (NGOs) consisting of only young volunteers. The core aims of UNYAs tend to be educating young people and the community about the work of the United Nations, supporting and empowering young people to get actively engaged in international affairs and civil society, representing the progressive views of young people at local, national, and even international levels, and being a friendly forum for young people to socialize and network. UNYAs run a variety of activities, such as establishing education programs to inform students about the UN and its work, organizing panel discussions and events, administrating Model United Nations meetings, as well as conducting UN Youth Delegate Programs.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of Event
1954-1968	Civil Rights Movement takes place in the USA
1945-1973	Protests against US involvement in the Vietnam war
April 15 th , 1989 – June 4 th , 1989	Tiananmen Square Protests in Beijing, China
December 2010 – December 2012	Arab Spring anti-government protests
February 16 th , 2012	Trayvon Benjamin Martin is fatally shot in Sanford, Florida, and inspires the creation of the BLM movement
January 17 th , 2013	The United Nations Office of Secretary General’s Envoy on Youth is formed.
July 2013	The BLM movement begins with the use of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter on social media
December 9 th , 2015	The United Nations Security Council adopts its first-ever resolution focusing especially on young people and the role of youth in building peace.
November 21 st , 2016	First Youth Forum on Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law at the UN office in Geneva.
March 24 th , 2018	March for Our Lives Demonstration
June 6 th , 2018	The Security Council adopts a second resolution that focuses on the role youth plays in conflict prevention. This made it mandatory for UN Member States to promote youth development and participation (UNSC resolutions are binding for all Member States).
August 20 th , 2018	Greta Thunberg and other activists protest for the climate outside the Swedish Parliament, setting the Fridays for Future movement into motion

September 20th, 2019	Young climate activist Greta Thunberg leads large, worldwide demonstrations about climate change. The majority of the protesters were students and young people from more than 180 different countries, once again conveying how great an influence young people can have.
May 25th, 2020	The killing of George Floyd, an African-American citizen, reignites the BLM movement with hundreds of protests and activist demonstrations worldwide. The focus of this was to eliminate racism and discrimination, especially towards people of color.

UN INVOLVEMENT: RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

UN Security Council Resolution 2250¹⁰

Unanimously adopted by Security Council Member States on December 9th, 2015, this resolution urges all Member States to respect the rights of young citizens and promote youth political participation within their country.

UN Security Council Resolution 2419¹¹

Following the aforementioned resolution, the Security Council passed yet another resolution concerning the youth of our world. The Security Council called for the Increasing Role of Youth in Negotiating, Implementing Peace Agreements and so this resolution is mostly focused on how a country's youth can contribute to public decision-making and peacebuilding. Furthermore, this resolution recognized young citizens' previous marginalization and that this was detrimental. Distinctively, we can see the connection between activism and youth political participation.

World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY)¹²

¹⁰ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sc12149.doc.htm>

¹¹ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2018/sc13368.doc.htm>

¹² https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/documents/wpay_text_final.pdf

The WPAY provides a policy framework and practical guidelines for national action and international support to improve the situation of young people. Due to this, the UN General Assembly declared the year 1985 as the International Year of Youth and considered the youth to be one of the main pillars of future young people actively participating in political discussions and movements. The UN also recognized the crucial role youth plays in the world - particularly their potential contribution to future development.

The WPAY program contains lots of analytical data that addresses the issue and makes numerous proposals on strategies and policies that can and should be adopted by member states.

UN Intervention and Assistance to Youth

The UN has assisted the Member States that did not promote youth political participation, marginalized the youth, and disapproved of youth activism to do so. Therefore, The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) has established youth forums, hired trainers who talk to young people and promote political participation through programs, promoted and assisted the creation of Youth Parliaments around the globe, cooperated with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and founded and created television broadcasts which promoted political participation. The UN has also assisted a significant number of the Member States such as Libya, Lebanon, and Azerbaijan to reform their youth policies, revise their education curricula and make the required changes to avoid the discrimination of youth in the future.

United Nations Youth Climate Summit

The UN Youth Climate Summit is a program for young climate action leaders to exhibit their resolutions at the United Nations and to engage in meaningful conversation with decision-makers on the modern-day issue of climate change and protection. The Summit took place on Saturday, September 21st, 2019, at the United Nations Headquarters in New York before the UN Secretary-General's Climate Action Summit on Monday, September 23rd.

The Youth Climate Action Summit united youth environment advocates from more than 140 nations and regions and allowed them to share their views on the worldwide stage and deliver a clear message to world leaders: we need to act immediately to address environmental change. The occasion gave voice to the

demands of youth for prompter activity to decrease ozone harming substance outflows. Unfortunately, after the 2019 UN Youth Climate Summit, the event was not repeated, failing to give youth a chance to be part of a future UN Youth Climate Summit.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Democratic Governance Thematic Trust Fund (DGTTF)

The DGTTF supports Youth and Political Participation by two main pieces of commitment. The first one is supporting young people's participation in democratic practices and inclusive political processes by enabling the environment for young people to commit, promoting the youth's skills and valid opinions, as well as promoting young women's participation in political decision making and their overall incorporation in political office.

As for the second measure, the DGTTF includes the youth in decision making, by including young people and young people-led organizations in UN decision-making and governance and promoting achievable sustainable human development as a long-term solution to engaged youth. The main aspect the DGTTF lacks in would be perhaps providing educational programs for young people who are newer to the field of political debate and engagement but are capable of providing resolutions, seeing that not all schools provide students with political education, and many are not extensively taught about political processes.

Asian Young Leaders For Governance (AYLG)

The UNDP Regional Service Centre in Bangkok, Thailand, implemented the AYLG initiative between the years 2005-2009. The project's aim was the creation of a tipping point in leadership development for satisfactory governance in the metropolis of Bangkok, by investing in young key change-makers who would have an influence on governance outcomes and aftermath. The training courses were composed of young leaders whose ages ranged from 25-35 years, who were taken in to work in government or generally in areas of leadership. The venture held 5 public and 2 semi-public leadership courses, trained 29 leadership mentors, and produced 187 leadership initiative colleagues. The program was exceptionally successful with

stakeholders and beneficiaries, who requested the program's continuation. Nevertheless, there was no continuation of the program, neither in Asia nor in any other continent internationally, despite both the success of and requests for continuation for the program

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Accessibility And Education

To promote youth activism, especially in politics, political education must be a priority in schools. If children learn about the importance of democracy, freedom of speech, as well as forming their own opinions and critical thinking, it will have a great effect on society. Additionally, the historical importance of different regimes and humanitarian and financial crises must also be taught, as being aware of historical examples, among other benefits, forms a basis for forming political opinions.

Development of the Youth Sector

By developing the youth sector, we would be creating communal spaces for young people and strengthening the abilities of youth to support participation. A crucial feature of programs that should be introduced is giving young people the opportunity to take the lead in developing and implementing their ideas and visions. Moreover, a variety of actions should enable capacity building, collaboration, and using teamwork to come up with innovative ideas by freely socializing with peers.

Inclusion (Primarily) Through Social Media

Younger generations have increasingly more contact with technology, making politics and current world affairs accessible to them at their fingertips. That is why promoting youth political participation through online resources such as movements and campaigns can lead to significant results in the political field. Despite the fact that there can be no legislation over that yet, it can strengthen the youth's participation and involvement in current global affairs. Directing our focus towards social media and their use to share valid information and promote progress, could ultimately make a vast contribution to resolving the issue at hand.

Government Funded Programmes

Government-funded programs would be a great opportunity for today's youth to become engaged with local as well as international politics. Through collaboration with the government, committed youth can experience what working with government would be like first-hand. Concerning education, if governments were to fund other educational initiatives, knowledge, and awareness in terms of politics and sociology would be increased, which in turn would promote youth civic engagement and interest in public affairs would be raised.

Skills Development And Volunteering

Another approach to the issue of youth political activism would be promoting the development of young people's abilities for youth activism through non-formal education, which may include volunteering to a great extent. Under the term non-formal education, it is understood that young people learn about participation through practical application.

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