



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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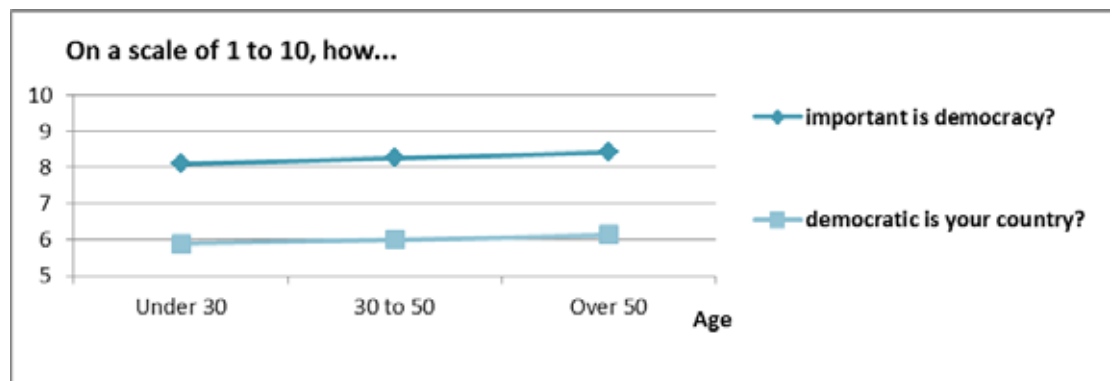
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Concept note for the General Debate on *Rejuvenating democracy, giving voice to youth*



These world averages, from the most recent World Values Survey¹, vividly illustrate a paradox. Around the world, people's desire to be governed democratically is very strong. But people's experience of democracy in practice is frequently fraught with disappointment. This is especially true for younger generations.

Public confidence in the institutions of democracy is regularly observed to be low, and falling. This is not new, nor can it be resolved overnight. Nevertheless, politicians, policymakers and anyone who cares about their country cannot fail to be struck by these low levels of trust. Another key indicator, turnout in elections, also shows a global decrease over time, particularly among young people. This threatens, in time, to undermine the very legitimacy of government and parliament, which are meant to act on behalf of the people.

Modernizing the culture, institutions and practices of democracy is therefore an urgent imperative. Around the world, countries are experimenting with new forms of representation and participation in decision-making. Young people, born in many countries as "digital natives", are at the forefront of demands for change.

"Rejuvenating" democracy offers the opportunity of harnessing the energy and ideas of young people by providing the necessary conditions for their full participation in the nation's social, economic and political development. With their energy and enthusiasm, young men and women are typically at the forefront of new technologies, ideas and expectations. By challenging the status quo, they infuse democracy with fresh perspectives. The wealth of contributions that young people have to offer – both at the institutional and grassroots levels - brings benefits to the whole of society.

¹ WORLD VALUES SURVEY Wave 6 2010-2014 OFFICIAL AGGREGATE v.20150418. World Values Survey Association (www.worldvaluessurvey.org). Aggregate File Producer: Asep/JDS, Madrid SPAIN.

As today's youth become tomorrow's adult population, youth participation is a sine qua non for the rejuvenation of democratic institutions and the inclusion of innovative ideas. This engagement also brings tangible benefits. Policy-making is more effective when it takes into account the needs of all sectors of society, including young people. Youth participation therefore will be vital for meeting the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Yet significant barriers to youth participation persist. Dissatisfaction with formal political processes has tended to increase, sometimes leading young people to look to other outlets or to abandon any hope for change. Young people often bear the brunt of economic and social hardship and are frequently the first victims of conflict. Young people are also politically underrepresented: although they constitute a fifth of the world's population, less than 2 per cent of the world's parliamentarians are under 30 years of age.

Democracy is resilient; as the only political system with the capacity for self-correction, it is constantly being renewed. But democracy can never be taken for granted. All parliamentarians have a responsibility to monitor the health of the system that has produced them, and in which they hold a special place as the representatives of the people.

In 2010, the Inter-Parliamentary Union addressed many of these issues in a forward-thinking resolution on *Youth participation in the democratic process*. The resolution called for targeted action on enhancing youth political participation and embraced a holistic approach which emphasized the interconnectedness of human rights, gender equality and social equity. The IPU's Forum of Young Parliamentarians is one direct outcome of that resolution. But what else has been achieved in follow-up to the resolution, and what more needs to be done?

The General Debate is an opportunity for the world's parliaments to:

- Assess the state of democracy in their country, for example by examining levels of voter turnout and public confidence in democracy, and identifying differences in the perspectives of men and women, and young people and the rest of society;
- Review action they have taken to address the challenges identified in the 2010 IPU resolution on *Youth participation in the democratic process*, the obstacles that have been overcome and those that remain;
- Take stock of how young people are changing parliaments and the ways that parliaments need to adapt to better accommodate youth;
- Showcase and share experiences, innovative ideas and forward-looking initiatives, and good practices which enhance democracy, particularly through the engagement of young people.
- Create conditions that are more conducive to the substantial contribution of young people to democratic process and related institutions.