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THE ROLE OF YOUTH IN PRESENTING DEMOCRACY

Democracy is often considered a destination or a finished product characterized by rules, institutions, or constitutional guarantees. As long as we recognize democracy and its ideals, the world will be fine. Yet, history teaches us a different story. Democracy is a living system. Similar to any other evolving organism, it constantly requires adaptation, nourishment, and defense when it is taken for granted. The current global climate of the world shows how this system is under immense stress. The challenges range from aggressive authoritarianism to eroding public trust in international institutions.

At the center of this tension lies the most assertive and influential force in global politics: the youth. For years, youth have been seen as simply a demographic that needs to be mobilized during elections. However, around the world, young people are progressively proving to be activists of political change. Rather than simply inheriting the previous systems of society, they are actively involved in reshaping global governance. Of course, this is not a simple journey.

For many young people, democracy is not a political concept; it is integrated into their daily lives and drives them to advocate for leadership, justice, and reconstruction. The Atlantic Council reports how many young Ukrainians have worked to integrate technology into their daily lives during wartime so that they can document war crimes and fight for international accountability.

Moreover, many young, inspiring individuals in Ukraine are working towards building an authentic human connection by being involved in youth movements. These specific movements encourage discussions about geopolitics, mental health, and other topics. Through these opportunities, students are able to make a difference and be heard.

For Ukraine specifically, it allows them to connect with youth programs in Europe and talk about their stories. Inspiring and hopeful young individuals view themselves as the primary force for recovery in Ukraine. Every day, they are committed to advocating for a better Ukrainian democracy. They fight for things like transparency and take measures against corruption. In the era of international media, storytelling and human connection are far more effective than the formal approaches of the past. They acknowledge that the country's future depends on accountability, reliable government, and sustainable partnerships.

Democratic legitimacy

Modern democracy is defined by ideals like accountability, freedom of expression, and the importance of laws and regulations. Around the world, we can see the practical application of these ideals is being tested. Misinformation and the fast-paced evolution of technologies have become a huge obstacle for democracy. In addition, from Eastern Europe to Tehran, the authoritarian powers have undermined the power of the media, corrupted the judiciary systems, and manipulated the integrity of electoral systems. In this context, international organizations like the United States

have struggled with proving their legitimacy. Youth around the world have been facing the effects of this decline, such as corruption, political instability, and climate instability.

Reforms

In the last decade, we have seen a global surge of political mobilization led by the youth. Rather than waiting for institutions to address the instabilities and issues in their societies, the youth are creating their own forms of accountability.

For example, the Atlantic Council highlights the role of “Generation UA.” This is a group that came together by a shared commitment to democracy and sovereignty. During Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, young Ukrainians have been actively involved in resistance. Through technology, they have created and utilized ways to spread global awareness and call for humanitarian support. Their actions illustrate how the youth are the first to acknowledge when their foundational principles are facing challenges.

This is not simply limited to places of conflict. In countries where there are heavy restrictions placed on the media, the youth tend to rely on each other to create networks for awareness.

The Representation Gap

Why is the participation of youth so low? Many countries adopt the system of gerontocracy. In India, for example, the youth represent a massive portion of the electorate, yet their function in the parliament is fairly low. In addition, East Asian nations such as South Korea and Japan have very low youth representation in the parliaments. The Inter-Parliamentary Union reports how the representation and involvement of youth in parliament has flat lined for the first time in many years. This lack of representation leads the younger generation to feel less connected and represented by their governments. One of the main reasons for this crisis is that foreign policy or government leaders only require experience. However, advocacy groups like the YIP have argued that this ideology is detrimental.

Foreign policy is about building and networking to influence and connect with people across borders. Excluding the youth prevents nations from listening to the voices that are the most adept at understanding current realities. With each generation, there is a greater capacity for connecting with peers from around the world and learning about different cultures. Governments should also understand the importance of climate policy, global health, and cybersecurity, which require new ideologies from the youth in order to succeed. For example, Armenia saw an increase in youth participation after political changes. Global public opinion is immensely influenced by digital ecosystems; young advocates are far more equipped with developing connections and strategies in a fast-paced world.

In order for the youth to be actually involved, nations should fund youth-led political campaigns, there should be more opportunities for youth to be representatives in international negotiations, and there should also be opportunities for the youth to share their expertise on foreign policy with their elders. This will allow them to practice civic entrepreneurship and not simply view this as a task for the future.

The Intersection of Economic Agency

A key value of democracy is the integration of politics with economic reality. Nations around the world face various issues like wealth inequality and housing costs. Youth should prioritize being educated on fiscal and economic policies and legislation that will address the root causes of economic issues. Democratic inclusivity means actually encouraging young individuals

to learn about things like tax codes and trade agreements. Youth involvement in economic governance can bring nations to feel a sense of shared prosperity.

The Sustainability of Activism and Mental Health

Finally, we must address the issue of how we can make activism sustainable? Many people see activism as a temporary phase of their life. However, the world is not simple. It requires strong individuals who are supported so they can be the primary force for recovery. Conflicts around the world take away many people's lives. Young activists often tend to feel burnout because they feel that the world is ignoring them and their society's problems. They start to feel hopeless and exhausted and nations end up losing their strongest champions. Mental health and activism are one of the strong roots of democracy. Normalizing mental health and providing support systems for individuals allow civic engagement to be sustainable and flourish. By prioritizing mental health and activism, we preserve advocacy and encourage people to defend democratic values.

Conclusion

The ideas of the youth should not be hidden. We should not treat democracy like an antique vase that is being passed down generations. Many young individuals around the world are architects, advocates, artists, engineers, mathematicians etc, with so many ideas and passions who are ready to rewrite their nations' stories and democracy. In order to preserve democracy, we should not continuously depend on the status quo; instead, we should willingly encourage the next generation to share their ideas and build something that reflects their values and perspectives in the changing times. This is why when the youth around the world empower each other, they become the most impactful protectors of democratic ideas and ensure that institutions and governments are relevant and resilient in a fast paced geopolitical world. It is truly inspiring to see young individuals come together from different backgrounds and different cultures.

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