

What's Next



Claiming the
Democratic Future



WORLD
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Background:

In recent years, there has been extensive debate about young people's apathy towards democracy. A plethora of research has been published documenting factors contributing to young people's discontent with democracy, such as polarization, economic frustration, challenges of corruption, violence, and conflict. However, it is essential to remember that dissatisfaction with the political institution does not mean a lack of belief in liberal democratic values. Moreover, youth democratic discontent is not an isolated phenomenon; it is happening in a political environment witnessing a worldwide democratic decline.

The young believers of democracy are responding to the democratic erosions by demonstrating their democratic ambitions and transforming political spaces through innovation, localized and intersectional approaches, arts, and digital media. Discontent with traditional political institutions has encouraged young people to create innovative and alternative spaces of political engagement. Thus, young people are at a critical juncture in reversing the anti-democratic trends, but the lack of a global youth campaign is a lost opportunity to capitalize on youth innovation to strengthen democracy. The "What's Next" campaign aims to fill this gap by building solidarity and empathy among these young visionary democratic leaders and civil society leaders striving to create a prosperous, democratic future. The campaign also aims to provide young democrats with a strategic framework for transforming these localized democratization actions into a global movement for democracy.

With the support of the World Movement for Democracy, the next generation of committed democratic leaders in more than ten countries organized brainstorming sessions to project their vision for a democratic future and identify significant elements of a strategic framework for implementing their vision. These sessions were organized in The Gambia, Georgia, Tunisia, El Salvador, Guatemala, West Balkans, Colombia, Lebanon, Philippines, Nepal, and Zimbabwe.

In these sessions, young people identified some of the most pressing challenges to today's democracy: political violence, hate speech and disinformation, socio-economic challenges, clientelism, corruption, immigration, gender and racial inequalities, regression of civil and political liberties, human rights violations and the rise executive power. Young people are aware of the detrimental impacts of polarization and populism on democracy and are concerned about the rise of authoritarianism and democratic erosions. The next generation sees a lack of youth-friendly spaces for political dialogue, a lack of leadership-building opportunities, a non-conducive environment within political institutions such as political parties for youth participation, and the urban-rural digital divide as significant challenges to democracy. Despite these challenges, young people are optimistic and are ready to claim a democratic future. The vision in this document outlines the values, goals, and recommendations to help us implement a more democratic future.

Youth Vision for Democracy

We, young people, believe that a democratic future is possible with young people at the forefront of democratic movements. The next generation of committed democrats is concerned with global democratic erosions and the growing discontent of young people with democracy. The next generation envisions a democratic future that responds to the contemporary challenges to democracy, is representative of diversity, and has mechanisms for protecting human rights. To revitalize the future of democracy, young people are working to transform political spaces through the innovative use of arts, intersectional localized approaches, digital platforms, and technology. The next generation of committed democrats is striving for a democratic future underpinned by the values of Inclusivity, Accountability, and Social Justice at its core.

Inclusivity:

We believe that democracy should provide a thriving, inclusive environment for young people to exercise their civil and political liberties and renewed avenues for the participation of young people in civil and political processes, especially those historically marginalized through systemic oppression.

Accountability:

We hope for a democratic future with mechanisms of accountable governance powered by a healthy ecosystem of information, where young people have access to information about decisions made by policymakers and are empowered to hold them accountable.

Social Justice:

We envision a democracy with social justice at its core—promoting inclusive socio-economic development, and racial and gender equality, and ensuring equal access to social goods such as healthcare, employment opportunities, and education.

Common Goals for the Youth Vision for Democracy

We envision an inclusive democratic future that responds to the unique challenges of our generation. Below we are outlining seven goals that can serve as the foundation to revitalize a democratic future that we aspire to achieve.

Participatory Policymaking

We envision a democratic ecosystem that presents young people with opportunities for meaningful participation in civil and political processes.

Participatory policymaking demands that young people are seen as equal stakeholders of democracy and partners in building a thriving democratic future. We hope for the participation of diverse groups of young people at different levels of the decision-making process in political institutions, including but not limited to, local governments, political parties, legislative bodies, and international institutions.

Inclusive Representation

We envision an inclusive democracy that is representative of the diversity of young people, including historically marginalized and vulnerable populations.

Our vision of inclusive democracy is inextricably linked to gender and racial equality—democracies can thrive in societies with systems in place to address inequalities and systemic exclusions.

Renewed Spaces for Public Dialogue

We envision a democratic future where our voices are amplified in the public sphere, and public dialogue leads to trust among the citizens and policymakers.

We hope for a democracy that has renewed avenues for dialogue between policymakers and citizens. Young people want institutional mechanisms and spaces where they can engage in dialogue on the issues affecting their communities with policymakers and fellow citizens.

Healthy Ecosystem of Information

We envision a democratic future with a healthy information ecosystem that empowers citizens and enables them to access credible and transparent information.

We believe a healthy information ecosystem protects citizens from disinformation and hate speech, reinforces participation in civic spaces, and enhances citizens' ability to hold leaders accountable.

Transparent and Accountable Governance

We envision a democratic future that is responsive to the political will of young people and where accountability systems are citizen centric and underpinned by the rule of law.

We believe in a future where transparent political institutions and processes provide access for young people to influence decision-making.

Social Justice and Socio-Economic Development

We envision a democratic future that embodies social justice and inclusive socio-economic development.

We hope for a democracy that can lead to better socio-economic outcomes for young people, improved living conditions, socio-economic equality, protection of human rights, and equitable access to social protection and public goods such as education, health, and employment.

Institutional guarantees of Civil and Political Rights

We envision a democratic future that reinforces institutional guarantees of civil and political rights and liberties.

We have a hope for democracy where young people are free to express their opinions, openly share their grievances, build solidarity, form associations, and peacefully organize in public spaces.

Recommendations: Call To Action

Below is our Call to Action for claiming the democratic future that, we, the next generation of democratic leaders have envisioned. We call upon the governments, policymakers, political institutions, civil society, and youth leaders to commit to the following.

Expand Civic Space for Young People

Expanding civic spaces for all young people call for recognizing the intersectionality and diversity of the identities of young people and the systemic historical exclusion of certain groups of young people based on gender, race, and ethnical identities from civic spaces.

Expand civic spaces for young people by investing in renewed inclusive avenues of inter-generational and intra-community dialogues that provide opportunities for communities to develop a collective political discourse leading to productive participation of young people in governance.

Expand civic spaces for rural young people by creating equitable opportunities for their participation in political institutions by making the internet and technologies accessible to rural young people thus bridging the urban-rural divide of youth participation in civil and political processes.

Expand civic spaces by developing mechanisms for the protection of democracy activists, journalists, and rights defenders living under authoritarian regimes. Moreover, by extending support to innovative civic participation avenues used by young people to shape their identities such as activism, digital technology, and social media.

Counter Disinformation

Disinformation and hate speech in online spaces is a threat to democracy and a vehicle for polarization. Achieving the goals of democratization calls for increased investment and partnerships for developing independent fact-checking mechanisms that enable the access of the next generation to transparent and accurate information and protect the integrity of electoral and political information.

Countering disinformation and online hate speech requires a commitment to citizens' digital media literacy programs and bridging the digital divide by making the internet and digital technology accessible to socially disadvantaged groups.

A healthy information ecosystem requires a commitment to free and independent media, effective implementation of the legislation for protecting the right to information, and mechanisms for protecting activists against online harassment.

Citizen-Centric Accountability

Transparent and accountable governance rests on the foundation of efficient, responsive dialogue between policymakers and citizens. Young people are often seen as apathetic, but in many cases, the accountability mechanism between citizens and the government is broken. The next generation can claim a democratic future by advancing citizen-centric accountability.

Build the trust of the next generation in democratic institutions by bridging the gap between citizens and policymakers through responsive public dialogue and providing multiple avenues to citizens for influencing policy decision-making and expressing their priorities.

Work towards openness and transparency of political and bureaucratic institutions towards citizens. Use accessible technological solutions to facilitate dialogue between citizens and policymakers and ensure access of the next generation to information about policies, public projects, and expenditures.

Achieving the goal of citizen-centric accountability calls for establishing Citizens' Grievance Redressal mechanisms allowing citizens to present their grievances and receive redressal and facilitating policymakers to understand the evolving needs of communities.

Delivering Democracy

For democracy to stay sustainable and resilient in the face of increasing authoritarian threats, it must deliver inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development, reduce structural economic inequalities and provide a financial safety net to vulnerable communities.

Achieving the next generations' vision would require a greater focus on ensuring democracies are able to deliver public goods such as quality education, a healthy environment, healthcare, and employment opportunities. Commitment to racial and gender equality in the accessibility of social protection services is crucial to end structural inequalities and provide historically marginalized groups a chance to improve their living standards.

Achieving the goals of the next generation for inclusive socio-economic development requires that young people are put at the center of economic policymaking, implementation, and monitoring. Recent economic disruptions have a disproportionate impact on young people; therefore, their participation cannot be overlooked in economic development initiatives.