



# **Bridging the Divide: Strengthening Partnerships Between Young People and Political Parties**

National Democratic Institute



## About the National Democratic Institute

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments; safeguarding elections; and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. NDI has worked with young people in more than 120 programs worldwide, across all geographic regions, to support them in playing a more active role in building strong and vibrant democratic societies. NDI supports young people of diverse identities and backgrounds to channel their energy, creativity and aspirations to become political leaders, activists and changemakers. For more information about NDI, please visit [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org).

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# Summary

Increasing the political participation and leadership of young people is a longstanding component of democracy and governance assistance. Predominantly, these efforts focus on equipping young people with political leadership skills and strengthening youth participation in traditional, formal political processes and institutions, such as parliaments or political parties. These types of programs and initiatives are more likely to reach a homogenous, elite pool of young people who are predisposed to political opportunities and have greater access to political actors, processes and institutions. Additionally, these types of programs and initiatives rarely acknowledge gender diversity and often fail to create an enabling environment for young women and young people who identify as gender diverse. Traditional youth political participation approaches often exclude the majority of young people and their priorities, especially young people with different starting points and needs based on identity,<sup>1</sup> location, experience and other circumstances. Considering rampant political exclusion and social marginalization, the divide between young people, especially those with diverse identities and backgrounds, and political actors and institutions, specifically political parties, is becoming difficult to bridge. Young people are increasingly turning away from parties and institutions and turning toward informal, nontraditional methods of political participation. However, turning away from political parties and institutions comes with negative consequences. Political parties continue to play a central role in the competition for power and how government functions. If young people only engage with democracy by employing acts perceived as “civil disobedience,” they will inevitably be left out of crucial decision-making processes. At the same time, political parties that continue to offer limited opportunities for engagement will only appeal to a small segment of young people, leaving the majority of the youth demographic excluded and disengaged from political decision-making.



In response to these trends, the Citizen Participation and Inclusion and Political Party teams at the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched the Bridging the Divide initiative with a focus on understanding the factors contributing to the growing divide between young people and political parties and developing resources that foster greater collaboration and solidarity across generations.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, NDI conducted a global review of youth political participation programs that included nonpartisan engagement with political parties. This report describes general trends in young people’s political participation through both informal and formal avenues and includes a series of abbreviated case studies on collaboration between young people and political parties from Chile, Ireland, Lebanon, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Spain and Tunisia.

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<sup>1</sup> Identity refers to gender, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other characteristics.

Based on the findings from each case study, this report describes three approaches that resulted in meaningful consultation or collaboration between young people and political parties:

### **1 Youth-sensitive party platforms and communication styles**

The Ireland and Spain case studies focus on political parties that actively involved young people and their views in shaping party platforms during the election cycle, including the benefits of youth-friendly communication mechanisms.

### **2 Cooperative and inclusive policymaking**

The North Macedonia and Nigeria case studies focus on collaboration between young people, political parties, and other stakeholders to develop laws and policies. The Chile example focuses on the power of youth-driven protests and the consequences of excluding young people from the constitutional reform process.

### **3 Youth-led political party formation and candidacy**

The Lebanon and Tunisia case studies focus on the efficacy of youth-led parties as an avenue to increase youth inclusion within the political party system and better engage young constituents.

Each chapter describes the political environment, the shifting relationship between young people and political parties, and the benefits and limitations of each approach. The approaches discussed in each chapter are accompanied by examples of young people's political engagement and efforts to bridge the divide between young people's extra-institutional political participation and opportunities to substantively engage with political parties. Drawing from the case examples, this publication provides lessons and recommendations for young people, democracy assistance practitioners, and political parties as they support and strengthen young people's collaboration with political parties and their inclusion in political decision-making.

## **Methodology**

Based on the premise of bridging the political divide between young people and political parties, NDI identified the following questions:

- What is the nature of youth disaffection from political parties and what are the implications for democracy support?
- What are the contextual factors to consider in identifying strategic entry points for meaningful collaboration between young people and political parties?
- Who are the political actors best suited to serve as interlocutors between young people and political parties?
- Which types of interventions or programs can help bridge the divide between young people and political parties?

Based on the research questions, NDI conducted a desk review to identify trends contributing to the growing rift between young people and political parties, trends in youth-focused collaboration or engagement with political parties, and mechanisms or initiatives that support meaningful collaboration between civil society youth and political parties. Based on the desk review and

interviews with NDI staff, technical experts and partners, NDI conducted a series of case studies in Chile, Ireland, Lebanon, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Spain, and Tunisia to examine the status, challenges and opportunities of youth participation in formal politics and identify entry points for collaboration between young people and political parties. Each case study highlights examples of collaboration between young people and political parties, lessons learned and recommendations to strengthen future programs.

## Recommendations

Identifying the intersection between young people's informal political activities and the efforts of political parties and formal governing institutions is imperative for the future of democracies. As the youth demographic moves steadily away from joining or engaging with political parties, youth mistrust and disaffection regarding political systems are unlikely to change. This is further perpetuated by parties that are unwilling to build a collaborative, dynamic and accountable relationship with young citizens. Additionally, political parties that are unwilling to consider gender inclusion beyond gender parity are at risk of reinforcing dominant, masculine party culture that is disempowering for all young people, particularly young women. Young people of diverse identities and backgrounds have innovative ideas and methods of participation and organizing that require visibility, validation and inclusion as necessary first steps to begin repairing the relationship. The case studies presented in this document are the basis for several practical recommendations.



## Democracy and Governance Practitioners

**To enable a stronger sense of ownership and commitment to political futures, intersectional, inclusive practices should be implemented. As a part of these efforts, practitioners should:**

- Encourage intergenerational collaboration through sustained, and if necessary mediated, dialogues between younger and older members of political parties and civil society organizations.
- Foster strong mentorship and allyship between older and younger organization members, with particular attention to the need for strong mentorship and allyship for young women and young people with disabilities.
- Create avenues for the participation of groups that reflect diverse sectors of the population concerning youth and gender diversity, ethnicity, religion, tribal affiliation, economic status and rurality among other possibilities.
- Connect young people with parties based on common goals or issues, beyond campaigning, and encourage political parties to develop mechanisms that allow them to regularly consult with youth constituents around the issues that matter most to them, such as climate change.
- Aim to establish strong working relationships among diverse, representative youth-focused or youth-led organizations and civil society actors who demonstrate a strong commitment to youth engagement or aim to enhance young people's status and place in society.

**Youth are often underrepresented in political institutions and at decision-making tables. To foster more inclusive decision-making practices and more representative institutions, practitioners should:**

- Encourage and support initiatives aimed at increasing young people's leadership and candidacy. Such initiatives may involve civic education initiatives; campaign strategies; interviews with current, young, political leaders; and youth-led education opportunities, where young people are educating other young people through community outreach and engagement.



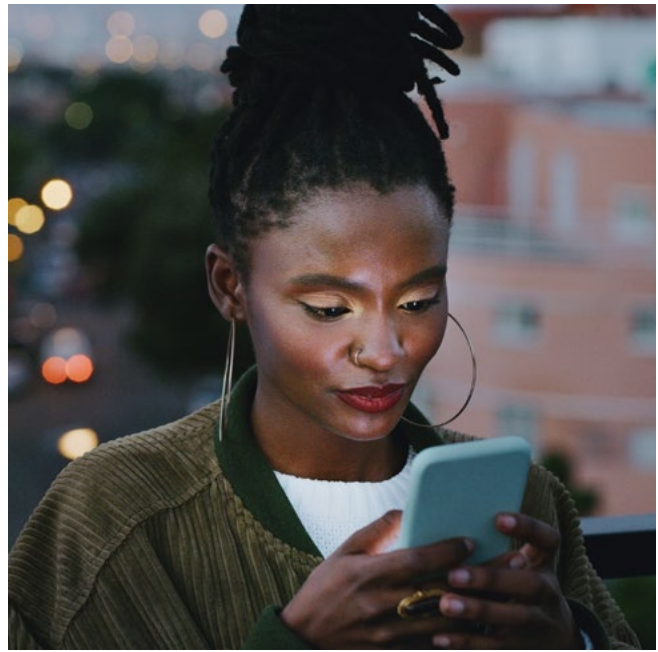
- Create and encourage youth inclusion in decision-making processes through the creation of youth caucuses or youth-inclusive mechanisms in legislative bodies at the local, regional or national levels.

## Young People

**To promote changes in policy outcomes and to foster stronger trust and engagement with formal political institutions, young civil society actors must find meaningful ways to engage with political parties.**

**As part of these efforts, young people can:**

- Identify opportunities to collaborate with political parties beyond traditional political party activities. For example, young people do not need to join a party or organize on behalf of a party to have their voices or perspectives included. Young people can collaborate with a youth caucus, a women’s caucus, an issue-based caucus, a party affiliated organization or a political party youth wing.
- Benefit from learning how to “deepen their engagement,” starting with a better understanding of available political entry points, including identifying key stakeholders and where to target their efforts. Young people have received a significant amount of training and capacity building but still require tangible leadership opportunities to use their skills and experiences.
- Deepen their commitment to inclusion by adopting a gender transformative approach and by collaborating with organizations representing segments of civil society that face additional barriers to political participation, including women; people with disabilities; ethnic and religious minorities; and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) communities.
- Foster relationships between young party members and youth in civil society through joint efforts including community-based events, or through mutual aid programs that aim to foster mutual respect and knowledge sharing.
- Identify allies and entry points within different political parties instead of limiting themselves to one party when organizing campaigns or initiatives. Young people can also consider collaborating with other youth-focused organizations to strengthen their efforts, with a focus on young people and organizations beyond the traditional democracy and governance actors.



## Political Parties

**To meet young people where they are and through their preferred communication styles, political parties should seek ways to enhance their use of social media platforms and other forms of communication. To this end, they should:**

- Co-create outreach and communication strategies with young people, including both party-affiliated and non-affiliated young people.
- Include young people in the party’s media and communications team and provide them with decision-making power over method and content.
- Enable young party members and supporters the autonomy to create content on the party-sponsored social media platforms to create more authentic and relatable communication strategies.
- Use livestreams, photos, short informational clips and links to share town halls and public events on youth-oriented social media sites like Instagram and TikTok to create greater transparency.
- Utilize social media platforms to survey young constituents about their wants, needs and demands while also creating space in party agendas, manifestos and debates for these issues to be discussed.

## Organizations Working with Political Parties and Young People

To encourage greater representation of young people's perspectives and ideas in party platforms and activities, organizations should:

- Provide opportunities for young people, including young women and young people with diverse backgrounds and identities, to engage with party members through youth-inclusive town halls and conventions that meet in locations accessible to young people, such as academic institutions or community centers.
- Aim to create meaningful experiences for young people to engage with political elites through experiential learning opportunities, such as visits to legislative offices, guest speakers or lecturers, and if amenable, internship opportunities.
- Identify opportunities for collaboration between youth-focused civil society organizations and political parties on issues that both groups care about.
- Work to support a youth caucus that has meaningful representation in party meetings and assemblies. Ensure that young women and young people of diverse identities and backgrounds can participate equitably alongside their peers.
- Move beyond interactions between political parties and young people that tokenize young people, exploit them or are extractive. These types of negative interactions make it difficult for young people to identify reliable allies or build trustworthy, sustainable partnerships. Parties should also develop mechanisms that allow for regular input and consultation from their youth constituency, regardless of who is in elected leadership.





# Research Methodology and Case Study Selection

Based on the objective of bridging the political divide between young people and political parties, NDI identified the following questions:

- What is the nature of youth disaffection from political parties and what are the implications for democracy support?
- What are the contextual factors to consider in identifying strategic entry points for meaningful collaboration between young people and political parties?
- Who are the types of political actors best suited to serve as interlocutors between young people and political parties?
- Which types of interventions or programs can help bridge the divide between young people and political parties?

Based on these research questions, NDI conducted a desk review to identify trends contributing to the growing rift between young people and political parties, youth-focused collaboration or engagement with political parties, and mechanisms or initiatives that support meaningful collaboration between civil society youth and political parties. NDI also hosted a roundtable discussion of 20 experts in the youth and democracy development space to brainstorm potential solutions for bridging the divide between youth and parties. Using this information, NDI selected seven case studies using the following criteria:

- National trends reflecting global trends and challenges regarding youth disaffection and political participation;
- Previous or ongoing efforts that engaged both civil society youth and political parties;
- Consideration of building both youth agency and a supportive environment for youth political participation;<sup>2</sup> and
- Substantive engagement between young people and political parties outside of elections.

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<sup>2</sup> “A Unified Theory of Change for Youth Political Participation Programs,” National Democratic Institute, <https://youthguide.ndi.org/unified-theory-change-youth-political-participation-programs>.

# Global Trends: Demographics, Preferences, Participation

## Diversity among today's youngest voters

Young people<sup>3</sup> under the age of 30, including young women and young people of diverse identities, make up over half of the world's population and, in some regions, young people comprise a rapidly growing segment of the population.<sup>4</sup> In addition to being among the largest population groups in many countries, today's youth are diverse. In addition to being more racially and ethnically diverse than previous generations, young people are also quite optimistic about their future<sup>5</sup> and increasingly identify themselves as global citizens.<sup>6</sup> Today's young people are: 1) very mobile, migrating within their countries — often to urban centers — and internationally;<sup>7</sup> 2) demonstrate empathy or concern for refugees;<sup>8</sup> 3) are less devout, or religious, than their parents; 4) are concerned about the environment, and often 5) interact more online through social media platforms than any other generation.<sup>9</sup>

Their optimism toward the future and increasing enrollment in tertiary education notwithstanding,<sup>10</sup> today's young people are being left behind; they are the most unemployed and underemployed segment of the global population and only about a quarter of secondary-education aged youth are enrolled in school.<sup>11</sup> The “NEET” youth (neither in education, employment or training) are also increasing in numbers, most significantly in Latin America, North America and parts of Europe.<sup>12</sup> Exacerbating employment challenges, approximately 30 percent of employed young people remain in extreme or moderate poverty despite having a job.<sup>13</sup> The situation is particularly acute for young women and other young people with diverse identities and backgrounds, such as those living with disabilities, migrant youth, as well as LGBTQI+ youth<sup>14</sup> or those living in conflict-affected settings.

<sup>3</sup> Young people or youth refers to people between the ages of 18 and 30 with diverse identities and backgrounds, including but not limited to young women, young people with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI+) youth, ethnic and religious minority youth and other communities experiencing marginalization.

<sup>4</sup> “Shifting Demographics,” *United Nations*. [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2019/10/un75\\_shifting\\_demographics.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2019/10/un75_shifting_demographics.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Babington-Ashaye, Yemi. “What do young people care about? We asked 26,000 of them,” *World Economic Forum*, November 8, 2016. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/11/what-do-young-people-care-about-we-asked-26-000-of-them/>

<sup>6</sup> Scout Youth Forum. *Global Youth Trends Report*, RoverNet: Geneva, 2014. [http://rovernet.eu/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/GYTRReport\\_Apr2014\\_FULL-FINAL.pdf](http://rovernet.eu/site/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/GYTRReport_Apr2014_FULL-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Scout Youth Forum, 2014

<sup>8</sup> Babington-Ashaye, 2016

<sup>9</sup> Scout Youth Forum, 2014; Babington-Ashaye, 2016

<sup>10</sup> International Labor Organization. *Global Employment Trends for Youth 2020: Technology and the future of jobs*. International Labor Office, Geneva: ILO, 2020. [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-dcomm/-publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_737648.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/-dgreports/-dcomm/-publ/documents/publication/wcms_737648.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. “World Youth Report: Youth and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.” *United Nations*. 2018. <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/wp-content/uploads/sites/21/2018/12/WorldYouthReport-2030Agenda.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> “Youth Not in Employment, Education, or Training (NEET),” Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. <https://data.oecd.org/youthinac/youth-not-in-employment-education-or-training-neet.htm>

<sup>13</sup> International Labor Organization, 2020

<sup>14</sup> United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019



In contrast to their male counterparts, young women in several regions of the globe,<sup>15</sup> face additional difficulties. Although girls and women are increasingly enrolling in education, gender gaps remain. Women are still less likely than men to be enrolled in education in most regions, but they are also particularly vulnerable as a result of discriminatory cultural and social norms, gender-based violence and other reasons.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, young women tend to agree that “life is better for men and boys than for women and girls.”<sup>17</sup>

These trends are important not only in differentiating young people’s experiences, but also in shaping youth attitudes and views about governance, political institutions and civic engagement. Young people’s experiences with the global economic crisis, rampant

corruption, increases in global conflict, and the climate crisis shape their perspectives on how to address many of today’s most pressing issues and expectations about the roles and responsibilities of government. Young people seem to want political institutions that are more honest, transparent and responsive. As a result of these perspectives, many young people today seek broad changes in their socio-political environment and they often believe that they can make a difference in how their countries are governed.<sup>18</sup> Despite this sentiment, young people are less likely to see involvement in formal politics as a viable pathway to enact such changes.

### Accessible mobilization, inaccessible institutions

Generally, today’s young people are disengaged from formal politics and prefer alternative forms of participation to enact change. These forms include mobilizing and networking online, participating in issue-based demonstrations and protests, and joining civic groups and transnational networks.<sup>19</sup> Youth-led and youth-inclusive social movements rose significantly over the past decade, accompanying a global increase in youth-led civil society organizations. Young people’s increasing involvement and interest in these kinds of informal politics is in stark contrast to the antipathy that young people possess toward political parties and established politics. According to a recent survey among millennials across the globe, only 19 percent feel as though their political leaders are making a positive impact, and 45 percent said they do not trust political leaders.<sup>20</sup> Similar findings have been iterated in interviews with young people across Europe who believe that politics is a place where old, racial and ethnic majority men gather, rather than a space where young people belong.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>15</sup> International Labor Organization, 2020

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Newall, Mallory, and Jackson, C. “Understanding the Perspectives of Young People Around the World.” IPSOS. September 24, 2018. <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/news-polls/Gates-goalkeepers-youth-optimism>

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. <https://data.oecd.org/youthinac/youth-not-in-employment-education-or-training-neet.htm>

<sup>20</sup> Deloitte. “The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2019.” Deloitte, 2019. <https://www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/global/Documents/About-Deloitte/deloitte-2019-millennial-survey.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Pilkington, Hilary, and Gary Pollock. “‘Politics are bollocks’: youth, politics and activism in contemporary Europe,” in *Radical Futures: youth, politics and activism in contemporary Europe*, edited by Hilary Pilkington and Gary Pollock, 1-34. Wiley-Blackwell, 2015.

Young people are much less likely to enter formal politics by joining a political party or an associated youth organization. There are several obstacles, both structural and socio-cultural, that lead to young people's disengagement from political institutions, like parties. Among the potential structural barriers are age requirements to vote or run for office, increased costs of participating in politics, and social and cultural traditions that maintain the status of politics as an arena for "mature citizens."<sup>22</sup> Additional obstacles include a lack of trust in political institutions, a lack of access to knowledge about the political process, and social and economic exclusions stemming from unemployment and poor economic situations.<sup>23</sup> Young people's disengagement from such institutions, however, are not unique. On the whole, political party membership has been in decline since at least the mid-1990s<sup>24</sup> and according to a recent report by the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS), *Raising Their Voices*,<sup>25</sup> less than 10 percent of young people worldwide are interested in joining a political party in established and emerging democracies alike.

Young people's disengagement from formal political participation has important ramifications for the relevance of democratic political institutions, trust in democratic politics, and ultimately the representation of youth perspectives in policy decisions.

## Promising Practices

Although youth engagement with political parties is on the decline, the following themes frame the findings: 1) youth-sensitive party platforms and communication styles; 2) cooperative and inclusive policymaking initiatives; and 3) youth-led political party formation and candidacy, which set the stage for shifting engagement between young people and political parties. Each case example and corresponding approach is a starting point for developing innovative strategies and activities that increase cooperation between young citizens, youth movements, youth-focused civil society organizations and political parties. Each example also demonstrates that when given the opportunity to work alongside political elites, young people can encourage change that is meaningful, powerful, and, importantly, inclusive of diverse ideas. While the contexts are different, each case discussed below demonstrates the meaningful ways that young people can use formal spaces and institutions to advance their goals.

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<sup>22</sup> "Obstacles at the Structural Level," ACE Project, <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt10/yt220/obstacles-at-the-structural-level>

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Van Biezen, Ingrid, Mair, P., and Poguntke, T., "Going, going, ... gone? The decline of party membership in contemporary Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 51, no. 1 (2015): 24-56. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.01995.x>

<sup>25</sup> "Raising their voices: How effective are pro-youth laws and policies?" National Democratic Institute, March 25, 2019, <https://www.ndi.org/publications/raising-their-voices-how-effective-are-pro-youth-laws-and-policies>.

# Findings

## I. Youth-Inclusive Political Parties

### Overview

Historically, young people's perspectives have been excluded from party platforms. Some suggest that this is the result of low youth voter turnout and a lack of accountability to young voters as a result. Yet, others suggest that because of exclusions from party platforms, many young people have disengaged from participating in formal politics. Regardless of the underlying causes responsible for a vicious cycle of disengagement and exclusion,<sup>26</sup> it seems clear that young people's preferences are often left unattended by political parties and other formal political institutions.

The following two case studies show that if parties recognize the calls of young activists and civil society organizations, they can engage youth, include youth in their platforms and provide avenues for youth autonomy and participation. As the cases of Sinn Féin (Ireland) and Podemos (Spain) demonstrate, young voters often react positively by engaging more deeply in the electoral process and often feel more hopeful about their futures. In Ireland, Sinn Féin used a youth-centered campaign that put young people's voices at the forefront, meeting youth where they were. In Spain, innovative organizational styles and communication tactics made active participation in the party more accessible for youth. Lessons from these case studies suggest that the positive experiences of interaction with formal political institutions may lead to potential long-term benefits as young people gain trust, feel more represented and ultimately are consulted on issues that matter to them.

The following two case studies highlight three promising practices between political parties and young people:

### 1 Youth-Sensitive Party Platforms

When political parties adopt party platforms and policies that reflect demands made by young people, young voters often become more engaged as a result. In these scenarios, young voters may be more inclined to cast votes for those parties, with the aim of electing candidates whom they feel best represent their interests. This demonstrates that there is an incentive for parties to listen to the wants and needs of young people and that young people can also benefit from the electoral process. However, it remains unclear how long this goodwill lasts. Parties that fail to follow through on their promises run the risk of further alienating young voters.

### 2 Youth-Oriented Communication Styles

Additionally, when parties utilize new communication technologies like Instagram and TikTok, they are better suited to reach younger audiences as they engage in youth culture. These efforts are further enhanced when parties allow their young members communicative autonomy, as young people may often feel claims made by older politicians on their platforms are less legitimate or genuine.

### 3 Inclusive Organizational Structures

Parties that allow for greater participation in internal decision-making processes may benefit from a more engaged youth electorate. The use of internet platforms such as Reddit, Instagram and Twitter, as a tool to gauge interest in policies as well as the use of online voting platforms enables political parties to reach younger electorates and activists in ways that are most in line with their communication styles. Moreover, these modes of communication and participation meet the demands for more transparent and deliberative forms of democracy made by today's youth.

<sup>26</sup> Stockemer, Daniel, and Sundstrom, A. "Age representation in parliaments: Can institutions pave the way for the young?" *European Political Science Review* 10, no. 3. (2018): 467-490. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773918000048>



# Ireland: Sinn Féin's Housing Platform and Youth-Led Campaign Strategy



Young people's trust in political institutions in Ireland is low — only one percent of people aged 18 to 30 have complete trust in the government (Feguson, 2019) and young people who are eligible to vote in the Irish national elections tend to do so less frequently than older electors (OECD, 2019). Yet, contrary to what their voter turnout rate might suggest, Irish youth are deeply invested in the political issues that concern them, especially issues surrounding youth unemployment and housing. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic recession, and nearly a decade afterward, Irish youth are suffering the consequences of major austerity measures that have had young people looking for ways to leave the country. Those who stay struggle as rent and housing prices have soared to an all-time high, leaving thousands unhoused. These ails have prompted an activist movement that has attracted many young people across Ireland; in cities, activists are squatting in vacant buildings, and in the capital, the Dublin Central Housing Action supports those affected by the housing crisis and pushes for change in government policy (Power, 2018).

Despite their efforts, young people's activism had gone largely unnoticed by governing officials until the country's 2020 general elections which saw Sinn Féin gain unprecedented support. In a shakeup of the country's long-standing duopolistic system, the fringe party — run by Mary Lou McDonald since 2018 — received the biggest share of first-preference votes in the Irish Republic's general elections and secured the same number of seats as the long-standing Fine Gael party in the Dáil Éireann.

Historically, Sinn Féin has been on the fringes of Ireland's political system given the party's historical ties to the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and to many in Ireland who lived during The Troubles (the period of ethnonationalist conflict over the status of Northern Ireland in the late 20th century), Sinn Féin and the IRA are still synonymous. To a younger generation of voters, however, memories of the party's violent past have long faded. Sinn Féin was one of the few parties that put young people's issues front and center, including gender equality and the rights

of women, combatting sexual violence, health, and the rising cost of rent and homeownership. The 2020 exit poll showed that Sinn Féin won the popular vote in every age bracket up to 65 and performed the strongest in the 18 to 34 age cohort (Marsh, 2020).

**What advanced the party's success and young people's votes for the party?** A platform that emphasized the issues that matter most to Irish's young voters and a communication strategy that put young people at its center. In other words, a *youth-sensitive party platform* and *youth-sensitive communication strategies*.

## Youth-Sensitive Party Platform

With housing being the top priority of young voters in the 2020 general elections — alongside education, health care and climate change — Sinn Féin's anti-austerity platform resonated well with young voters. The party promised rent freezes, paying back large sums to renters and an enormous increase in funding for public housing. The campaign's focus on housing and social justice actively engaged and invigorated the youth demographic who felt that their concerns had been trivialized by the mainstream government parties.

## Youth-Oriented Communication Styles

Although Sinn Féin has a long history of circumventing mainstream media, social media offered the party a new tool for communicating with the youngest voters. Indeed, in the weeks leading up to the elections, Sinn Féin's social media presence grew larger than that of both the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael parties — on its most important platform, Facebook, it had around 10 times more engagements than any other political party in Ireland (Keena, 2020). Additionally, giving autonomy to its youth organization, Ógra Shinn Féin, to advance the party's campaign via social media, Sinn Féin was the only political party to have an active presence on TikTok. Using youth-created campaign messages, the party was able to speak to young voters in their own "language."

## LESSONS FROM SINN FÉIN

By using social media to engage, inform and debate, Sinn Féin harnessed the power of online activism to its advantage while discrediting claims of young people being disenchanted or disinterested in politics. As is evident in young Irish citizens' anti-austerity activism and the results of the 2020 general elections, young people are a group that is deeply invested in political issues. One of the more significant lessons learned is that political parties have a lot to gain from giving agency to young people and equally as much to lose by trivializing their concerns. Another impactful takeaway from this case is that in political systems where the threshold to formal participation in politics seems high, political parties can make use of less formal channels to reach out to young people and engage them politically in less formal ways. For example, the barriers to participation for young people include a feeling of alienation from politics, lack of youth representation and a deprioritizing of issues impacting young people.<sup>27</sup> Parties like Sinn Féin and the Green Party ran on platforms of radical change and consulted young people as they developed their manifestos, which helped garner youth interest and ultimately votes.

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<sup>27</sup> Daly, Olivia. Fit for Purpose: How can the Irish Political System Adapt to Meet the Needs of Young People, TASC, University of Cambridge, March 2021. [https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/tasc\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_irish\\_politics\\_youth\\_020321\\_f.pdf](https://www.tasc.ie/assets/files/pdf/tasc_policy_brief_on_irish_politics_youth_020321_f.pdf)

# Spain: Podemos' Protest Roots and Youth-Oriented Communication Styles



Spanish youth, similar to the general population, are pessimistic about democracy in their country. They harbor strong doubts about democracy, are concerned about inequality, and are concerned about the availability of well-paying jobs that will provide economic security for themselves and their future families (Mordecai, 2019). Furthermore, a majority of Spaniards have little faith in elected officials or the government more broadly. Among young Spaniards, only 38 percent of those aged 18 to 34 believe that the state is run in the best interest of its people, a stark contrast to those 60 and older (55 percent) (Mordecai, 2019). Yet, contrary to youth's pessimistic view of their political system, Spanish millennials are more politically active than other generations in recent decades, which may be a result of their discontent with the political status quo.

Among young people in Spain, there is a general feeling of frustration with a political and economic system that is leaving them behind. Like so many other countries in Southern Europe, Spain has experienced a deep economic crisis accompanied by unprecedented political and institutional crises that have disproportionately affected young people (Benedicto and Ramos, 2018). In 2014, approximately one in four Spaniards, half of whom were under 25, were unemployed (Kennedy, 2014). Figures from 2017 showed that approximately three of every four Spaniards between 15 and 24 worked on temporary contracts, which prevented most of them from gaining permanent employment and reaching an independently livable wage (Sanchez, 2017). Young workers earn approximately 8,000 to 9,000 euros less than the average salaried population and therefore, young people's economic independence (partial or total) has reached an all-time low of just 57 percent. The politicization of their discontent with the system and their desire to challenge the status quo has been one of the driving forces of young people's increased political activity and their support for the Podemos party.

Finding a place on the Spanish political map in 2014, the Podemos party developed out of the 15-M and Indignados movements of May 2011 when protests filled Spain's popular squares. Initially, youth-led protesters demanded "Real Democracy Now!" and an end to the duopolistic system they felt served the economic and political interests of the elite rather than the Spanish people (Flesher, 2015). The actual party was formed in January 2014, when a group of left-wing intellectuals and activists published a manifesto titled, "Making a move. Turning outrage into political change" (Vittori, 2019). The party promises a better future by rejecting fiscal austerity measures, a proposal to lower the retirement age, and suggestions to reduce the work week which would also help to alleviate unemployment (Weisbrot, 2015). Podemos is the favorite among voters younger than 35 and especially with new voters (Flesher, 2015), a result of its **policy proposals, youth-oriented communication styles** and an **innovative organizational style**.

## Youth-Oriented Communication Styles

Podemos has utilized new and novel forms of communicating with its constituents making it both a more competitive party in Spain, as well as a favorite among young voters. In 2016, the party utilized the design of the well-known IKEA catalog as its party platform template. Stressing that campaigns need to be novel, the catalog-styled program not only brought a freshness to party manifestos, but it was also more accessible with bright colors and text broken up by images of the party members and party leader, Pablo Iglesias. The program appealed to younger voters who are often tired of party manifestos that feel outdated and inaccessible and garnered the party 40 percent of the under-40 youth vote (Arias-Maldonado, 2016).

## Organizational Structure

Since its founding, the party has maintained two basic principles for organizing: 1) a highly structured organization with local branches and grassroots alliances with local social movements and 2) an insistence on direct democracy as the primary decision-making process (Vittori, 2019; Chironi and Fittipaldi, 2017). To achieve these goals, the party has used the internet and social networking platforms such as Reddit, Instagram, Twitter and Telegram (Vittori, 2019). As a result, Podemos has organized itself in a way that is amenable to broad participation of the voting population, including young people. Not only does the party promote direct

democracy in its deliberations at the local and provincial levels by allowing members and sympathizers to submit policy suggestions (Kennedy, 2014), it is among the first parties to utilize online voting for determining regional and national party candidates (Perez-Nievas et al., 2020). Furthermore, the party allows new party members to vote in its internal elections immediately if they maintain active status in the party (Vittori, 2019). This is different from many other parties that have strict waiting periods before new party members can partake in party decisions, such as primaries, creating incentives for more participation in the party's affairs (Perez-Nievas et al., 2020).

### LESSONS FROM PODEMOS

By using online platforms like Reddit and other social media sites as well as novel new mediums of party platforms, Podemos has both enabled direct participation in party affairs and made politics more accessible to today's young people. As is evident in young Spanish citizens' support for Podemos, this young population is deeply invested in building and participating in a political system that is more responsive to their demands. One of the more significant lessons learned from this is that political parties have much to gain from allowing their members to participate in party decisions, as well as providing new and fresh modes of communication with young constituents.





# North Macedonia: Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies



Young people's economic and political opportunities in North Macedonia mirror other countries in the region, with limited opportunities for meaningful civic and political engagement and the government's persistent inability to address youth unemployment and "brain drain." Migration of young people is widely recognized to be a threat to North Macedonia's development and the desire to migrate is statistically stronger among young people who are unemployed, identify as Albanian and/or other ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ youth (Zivetz, 2019). Furthermore, a history of corruption and state capture undermines young people's confidence in the government and their willingness to participate in shaping the future of the country. These factors contribute to feelings of exclusion, which are amplified for young people who have been traditionally marginalized — Roma, young people with a disability, LGBTQI+ youth and young women.

Despite moderately low levels of civic and political engagement and trust in government institutions, the urban areas of the country, especially the capital, have a robust youth civil society including **The National Youth Council of Macedonia** (NYCM). The NYCM holds offices in seven cities across the country and represents 55 groups. It is based on an EU model of national youth councils and has successfully implemented substantive youth initiatives. However, general awareness of their accomplishments or greater awareness of opportunities for youth participation is low.

The government has made several attempts at increasing youth engagement and participation, yet many of these attempts failed. One such attempt, in 2009, was a bill on youth engagement that was drafted by the government without public consultation, then introduced for public discussion. In response to the bill, a coalition of civil society organizations (CSOs) formed an alliance to consolidate and present their recommendations and amendments. Many youth-led CSOs felt that they had been completely excluded from the drafting process and were in direct opposition to passing the bill. As a result, the government quickly rescinded the bill and,

in the process, stalled progress toward formal youth engagement policies or legislation. In 2017, under the purview of the newly created Club on Youth Affairs and Policies, efforts to introduce a youth law were renewed.

In 2020, following enormous efforts by a cross-sectoral, diverse working group made up of individuals from different social and political backgrounds, North Macedonia passed the National Youth Law. This collaborative effort, emphasizing the benefits of **youth inclusion in policymaking**, created enough momentum to pass the bill.

## Youth Inclusion in Cooperative Policymaking

The bill was drafted within a working group created in 2018 comprised of individuals from civil society, youth party wings, members of parliament and officials from various federal ministries:

- Government Cohort – seven individuals from government agencies and ministries including the Agency for Youth and Sports, the Ministry of Justice, and the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy;
- Parliamentary Cohort – three members of parliament;
- Non-Governmental Organization Cohort – nine individuals from three organizations; and
- Political Party Youth Wing Cohort – two members from the main opposition party.

The composition of the committee designated to draft the bill shows the inclusive nature of the process. It also demonstrates the commitment of youth organizations and members of North Macedonia to create an inclusive and fitting youth law. Each cohort took on particular tasks associated with the bill allowing them to capitalize on their skills and expertise. For example, the government cohort built a website for the committee allowing them to hold meetings with committee members as well as town halls with the public. The parliamentary members took advantage of their personal and professional relationships with members of other parliamentary committees to hold working group sessions and public hearings. These

engagements were instrumental in garnering attention for the bill and getting input from diverse groups on early drafts. The party representatives on the committee added another layer of legitimacy by significantly aiding the group in asserting an apolitical mandate while maintaining multi-partisan buy-in from the most influential political parties.

In addition to North Macedonian stakeholders, international actors, including NDI and Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), provided technical assistance and expertise as needed. These external organizations were described as the “glue” that kept the working group together.

Cooperation does not come without its challenges. Throughout the process, working group members had to overcome several challenges due in part to the absence of trust among members, because of failure to collaborate meaningfully in the past and because of competing interests. Moreover, although some aspects

of the process were impeded by the horizontal decision-making structure, the choice to require group consensus was deemed necessary due to the diversity of the individuals and organizations represented.

Ultimately, however, the working group was able to create a draft bill in the first six months following the group’s formation. After the law was complete, the working group consulted the public, another key aspect of the cooperative and inclusionary nature of the bill. During May and June 2019, members of the working group participated in 20 online and in-person events. Through increasing attention to and acceptance of the bill among civil society groups, the working group was able to secure two parliamentary debates around the bill. After an unengaging initial reading, the second parliamentary debate garnered nine amendments. On January 14, 2020, the Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies was adopted.

## **LESSONS FROM PASSING THE LAW ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND YOUTH POLICIES**

One of the more impactful takeaways from this case example was the significance of establishing a diverse working group with cross-party buy-in and support, and maintaining momentum within the working group over a period of several years. The policy drafting process proved necessary for resolving tension between working group members, particularly party youth wings and civil society groups. Working group members established collaborative partnerships and new norms of engagement with other members that extended beyond the process and may create opportunities for increased youth engagement in the future. In addition, the working group created opportunities for individuals to work across sectors of the North Macedonian society which allowed youth policy priorities to receive broad attention. This was an important step toward mainstreaming youth policies. Similarly, the cohorts included in the project were able to utilize their respective skills, networks and expertise, something that helped to strengthen cooperation and the quality of the bill. Finally, the inclusion of parliamentarians in the working group both enabled an entry point for external bodies, like civil society organizations, to call a public hearing for issues of their concern and created an important mediator between youth civil society organizations and political party youth wings, which had a history of distrust. In general, the North Macedonian Law on Youth Participation and Youth Policies was an inclusive process that stands as a model of both youth inclusion in policymaking as well as broad, cooperative policymaking.

However, challenges remain. Despite broad-based inclusion that helped working group participants overcome attitudes of distrust and fostered a sense of ownership in the passing of this legislation, there is still a long way to go to increase youth’s overall participation and engagement with formal politics in North Macedonia. The majority of young people had little concern for the law, and some felt as though it would do nothing to change their situation. Better articulation of the purpose of law and leveraging civil society partnerships could have garnered greater buy-in among young people. The groups’ approach toward consultation and outreach, especially outside of urban areas, should have been better tailored toward the interests and motivations of young people, particularly explaining how North Macedonia’s youth law will impact them and how to advocate for implementation of the law on the local level. Thus, further action is necessary to increase young people’s belief and trust that legislation can and will impact their lives.

# Nigeria: #NotTooYoungToRun Campaign



Nigeria, Africa's most populous country,<sup>28</sup> is one of the most youthful countries in Africa and in the world. With a population of more than 180 million, those between the ages of 15 and 35 constitute roughly 70 percent of the population (WFD, 2020; Unah, 2018). Of those young people, recent reports from late 2020 reveal that approximately 13.9 million are unemployed — 41 percent of whom are between the ages of 15 and 24, and 31 percent between the ages of 25 and 34 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The high unemployment rate has been synonymous with increased insecurity and poverty and increased migration of the country's young able-bodied citizens (Nairametrics, 2020). These statistics are important as Nigerian young people have struggled to gain greater representation in parliament and to find policy solutions that work for their generation.

The #NotTooYoungToRun, or #NTYTR, campaign was first introduced by the **Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement — Africa** (YIAGA Africa) in 2016 and was later joined by **Youngstars Development Initiative** (YDI) and **NDI**. The campaign was set against the backdrop of a failing state and an undermining of the country's democracy (YIAGA, 2020). The campaign, while ultimately seeking to change the situation of the country's youth populations through increased representation, specifically aimed to amend several sections of the Nigerian constitution to reduce the eligibility age for both the House of Assembly and House of Representatives from 30 to 25 years of age; the Senate and Governorship from 35 to 30 years of age; and the office of the president from 40 to 35 years of age (Krook and Nugent, 2018). The campaign successfully led to the Age Reduction Bill being signed into law on May 31, 2018, a day that will be remembered in Nigerian history as the “youthquake” (YIAGA, 2020). The success of the campaign can be attributed to the following practices: **inclusive and cooperative organizing, citizen-parliamentary cooperation** and **inventive media campaigns**.

## Inclusive and Cooperative Organizing

Bringing together approximately 100 youth and civil society organizations drawn from across the country, from the outset, the lead organizations worked to create an inclusive and cooperative movement. They emphasized the importance of a broad-based movement that brought together young people, pooled their resources and ideas, and worked hand in hand to create the power needed to affect the change the groups wanted to see (YIAGA Africa, 2020). Through group and independent collaboration, the campaign built relationships between organizations and stakeholders from different aspects of Nigeria's civil society, trade unions, professional associations, community organizations and faith-based organizations (YIAGA Africa, 2020). A testament to the success of such organizing were the synchronous, peaceful and powerful marches to state assembly houses in 19 states between March 30 and April 10, when the government nearly rejected the bill. While working toward the same end, individuals and organizations took responsibility for advancing the cause through their personal networks and leveraging their expertise. This form of organizing ultimately allowed for flexibility, different modes of campaigning and a sense of ownership and autonomy within the larger movement. However, while the movement championed inclusion, there was a lack of young women and young people with disabilities in leadership positions.

## Systematic Engagement with Democratic Institutions

Although the movement sought to affect significant changes in access to political leadership, leaders of the movement also realized that real change would require working strategically and systematically with democratic institutions. The movement sought to include and engage several “influencers” in their campaign including political party leadership, traditional/religious leaders and the

<sup>28</sup> “Population, total – Nigeria,” *The World Bank*. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=NG>

drafters/consultants to the committee on constitutional review (YIAGA, 2020). They sought ways to work with politicians to change the system by following a strict set of engagement principles.

The groups involved in the movement were successful in systematically engaging with political leaders at the state and national levels. Not only was the movement successful in getting the bill introduced in the House of Representatives, but it was also successful in lobbying legislators. Members of the movement lobbied political elites through “advocacy visits,” such as placing placards at the entrance of parliament and participating in several peaceful protests (Unah, 2018). In addition, the groups organized a town hall meeting with speakers of six houses of assembly where they discussed the bill to get a public commitment from the lawmakers (Unah, 2018).

Ultimately, by working with and holding lawmakers and other political leaders accountable, the #NTYTR movement enabled both lawmakers and their young constituents a platform for negotiation and cooperation while also ensuring that those with the most power were held accountable for their commitment or lack thereof.

### Inventive Media Campaigns

The campaign was successful at holding political leaders accountable and persuading them to stand behind the bill through their strong use of media and public shaming tactics. The movement’s map of “shamers and famers” enabled the movement to call out legislators who either refused to back the bill or sought to water down its demands, and represents an effective use of social media (YIAGA, 2020; Unah, 2018).

## LESSONS FROM THE #NOTTOOYOUNGTORUN CAMPAIGN

The #NTYTR campaign provides several important best practices for the greater inclusion of young people in political decision-making and for organizing youth-led movements to achieve their intended goals. The #NTYTR campaign combined a strong effort of incorporating inclusion and cooperation to meet its goal of reducing the age requirement for political office in the country. Through an independent yet cohesive model, the campaign brought together groups from all sectors of Nigeria to rally behind a shared cause. Individuals and organizations were given the resources and tools needed through broad cooperation and were also encouraged to use their own expertise and networks to help further the cause, instilling a sense of ownership and autonomy to those involved. Another significant lesson from the #NTYTR campaign is the important role that engagement with democratic institutions and political elites played in the success of the movement. Despite a sense of disenchantment and disillusionment with the weak political institutions in the country, young people involved in the campaign sought ways to meaningfully engage political elites in their cause. They found allies in the House of Representatives, lobbied individual lawmakers and demanded accountability from them. They also successfully used media and social media to gain attention. The publicity, both positive and negative, enabled the group to shift the tide of support in places where the bill was met with opposition.

# Chile: Student Mobilization and the Constitutional Convention



Student-led protests are a part of Chile's history. Under former President Augusto Pinochet, young students took to the streets demanding regime change. Those students, including young women and Indigenous people, faced deep struggles and state-sanctioned violence. Although students participating in Chile's most recent student-led protests are too young to remember those earlier movements, they echo the calls of the past, demonstrating the need for further reforms (Smith, 2019).

Facing significant barriers to higher education and rampant economic inequalities, Chilean youth have been demanding policy changes to the market-oriented education system organized by Pinochet for over 15 years (Bellei and Cabalin, 2013). Beginning in 2006 when students protested in what has been named the "Penguin Revolution" after the students' uniforms, Chilean students engaged in protests in 2009, 2011, 2016, and most recently in 2019 (Cuffe, 2019). In all cases, the students demanded changes to an education system that has led to substantive inequality in access to and the quality of education. For students in Chile, the education-focused protests were symptomatic of the need for broader changes throughout the country including an overhaul of education, health and pension systems. The student-led protests of 2019 evolved into national protests, which were triggered by a fare hike on the Santiago metro. On October 25, 2019, over 1.2 million people took to the streets of Santiago to protest against social inequality, demanding President Sebastián Piñera's resignation.

The 2019 protests led to a substantial victory for everyone who was inspired to participate in the movement (Cuffe, 2019), as they were successful in their demands for a constitutional referendum. When the country went to the polls on October 25, 2020, many voters were young, first-time voters. The country ultimately voted to rewrite the constitution through a specially elected constitutional convention (Kaltwasser,

2020). This will be the first constitution generated entirely by democratic means in the more than 200 years of Chilean history as an independent country.

The 155-member constitutional convention will be made up of elected citizens and will have gender parity in its representation (McGowan, 2021). The mandate also reserved 17 seats for Indigenous representation (Reuters, 2020). While these metrics illustrate the promise of a more inclusive political process, only those age-eligible to stand for election will be included in the constitutional convention. As a result, the majority of the young people who fought and protested to bring about change in Chile, and who inspired so many others to participate in the demands for change, will remain unrepresented among the committee.

The Chilean case, therefore, represents *a potential missed opportunity* to meaningfully engage young people in the establishment of a new constitution in Chile. The underrepresentation of young people in the constitutional committee risks not only the potential to exclude young people's ideas and perspectives from the constitution, but also to discourage young people's further engagement with the country's political institutions or during political processes. In similar ways that there was a mandate for the inclusion of Indigenous peoples and to ensure gender parity, the inclusion of youth as part of those mandates or as a caucus in the congressional committee could have been a meaningful attempt to include young people. Further, it would have set a standard for future political processes or an example for other countries undergoing similar reforms.



## **LESSONS FROM STUDENT-LED PROTESTS IN CHILE**

The tenacity and drive of Chilean young people is inspiring. Their hard work and dedication throughout a pivotal political upheaval inspired Chileans of all ages and backgrounds to demand meaningful change in their democracy. Despite this, young people will be largely absent from the country's forthcoming constitutional convention. This case demonstrates that even when young people are the catalyst for change, they are not guaranteed a seat at the table, often because of their age. This suggests that, in some cases, young people may need institutional guarantees for their inclusion in decision-making processes. Young activists and citizen groups may need to organize and push for the adoption of mechanisms for public participation during the convention. For example, public hearings, public constituent briefings and town hall meetings have been proposed as well as an Indigenous consultation mechanism, which would convene consultations for the Indigenous peoples of Chile to advance proposals. If these mechanisms are carefully designed and implemented, they can provide young people with meaningful opportunities to lend their voices and create pressure from outside the process. Whether young people have opportunities for diverse representation throughout the constitution-drafting process will have long-standing consequences for the future of democracy in the country. Young people's participation has the potential to foster democratic norms of participation and transparency as well as commitment to the political process and political institutions.

## III. Transitioning from Civil Society to Political Party (Political Candidates)

### Overview

Many young people have shown considerable disinterest in participating in or engaging with political institutions, often preferring to voice their opinions and discontent with their social, political and economic environments through non-traditional forms of political participation (Ace Project, 2018). Despite this trend, growing recognition that change can only occur with the cooperation of political institutions has led some to utilize new forms of organization to achieve their goals.

The following two cases demonstrate how youth-led and youth-oriented social movements and associations are working to train and advance candidates for office while remaining tied to their cause as a movement and/or association. The case of Lebanon demonstrates how what started as youth-led protests against growing economic inequality and a failure of the state, led to the creation of new youth-led political parties which counter sectarian political divisions and advance youth's political participation and representation. In Tunisia, where political parties are viewed with deep skepticism, the association 3ich (Aich) Tounsi works to support independent candidates that advance the association's goal of delivering politics for and derived from the Tunisian people under the slogan, "Don't be afraid, we're not a party!" In both cases, the establishment of a new party and/or association attempted to shake up their political systems and gave a glimpse at what could be a rising trend in political activism and organization: movement or association-based youth parties.

The following two cases highlight these best practices:

#### 1 Inclusion in Voicing Demands

Inclusion in voicing demands over policies and in overall decision-making processes enables young people to participate in significant ways in organizational decisions. Meaningful, inclusive decision-making is of the utmost importance for the continued engagement of young people in political institutions. Inclusive decision-making practices and demand-making highlight respect and a commitment to the active involvement of younger generations who have different lived experiences and perspectives and are often marginalized as too radical

or naive. When included in decision-making processes, young people develop a sense of ownership and commitment to the cause. If the goal is to keep young people interested in formal politics and to bolster their attitudes toward democracy, including them in decisions and in the demand-making processes is a key step.

#### 2 Intergenerational Cooperation

One critical component is the mutual respect and inclusion of both older and younger generations in decision-making and organizing processes. Despite having different lived experiences and often different perspectives on important organizational and policy decisions, the cooperation between older and younger generations is imperative for success. Younger voices are often sidelined as inexperienced or radical and older voices are misunderstood as too "status quo" rather than innovative and new. Bringing together older and often professionalized voices with those of innovative and energetic youthful perspectives enables more comprehensive and inclusive decisions and policies. In making mutual decisions, younger and older generations develop deeper respect for one another and demonstrate to both older and younger constituents that all points of view can be represented.

#### 3 Intersectional Cooperation

Today's young people belong, in many cases, to the most diverse generation and these diverse perspectives, importantly, need to be recognized. The case of Lebanon demonstrates how a shift in perspectives of difference can lead to intersectional, cooperative movements and organizations that aim to connect individuals through mutual respect. Including voices across racial, ethnic and religious lines is an important step in fostering greater attachment to political institutions, especially as today's youth are often less religious and more ethnically diverse.

# Lebanon: Youth-Led Political Parties, Sabaa



Like many other countries in the region, Lebanon is facing a deep economic crisis; stagnated growth and a large debt burden have left the country in a difficult position. The unemployment rate of those under 35 is nearly 40 percent and the country's infrastructural problems have led to daily power outages, costly access to communication services and sanitation issues (Reuters, 2019). These situations have left many disillusioned with the political elites and sectarian politics.

However, over the past five years, mass protests have led some groups to realize that the only real way to change the situation in Lebanon is to engage in formal politics themselves. Following mass movements against the sanitation crisis in the country, several new, "challenger" parties have risen in the country including Sabaa, a youth-led and youth-founded political party (Battah, 2019). Sabaa, which means "seven" in Arabic, seeks to move beyond sectarian politics by presenting an inclusive platform that spans religious lines (Reuters, 2016). The party defines itself as "a people-powered modern political party with citizen-centricity at its core," which aims to provide a platform for the organization and participation of citizens in public life and to "foster new leadership across the nation" (Dagher, J. and Noujeim, S.J., 2017).

While Sabaa has not reached representation at the national level, it has fielded candidates at both the local and national levels with the hope that as the party ages, it will gain more prominence and political legitimacy. In an interview with one of the party's members, she states that the party itself is young, but she hopes and believes that it will be more successful in the upcoming 2022 elections. She cites the continued discontent among Lebanese citizens, especially the young ones, but their continued commitment to democracy fuels her optimism.

The party is unique from traditional political parties and has made strides with regard to establishing inclusive measures and internal policies. First, the party sees itself as a platform rather than a hierarchically organized political party. There is no party leader, rather a committee of board members who use participatory decision-making tactics to make party decisions. The party is therefore demonstrating **inclusive decision-making practices**. Second, although the party grew largely out of youth activism and engagement, it has a strong inter-generational membership. Young people's perspectives are dominant; however, older Lebanese citizens also engage with the party combining creative and energized ideas and actions of young people with the insights and experiences of their older counterparts. The party therefore also represents a best practice of **intergenerational cooperation**. Finally, as the party moves beyond sectarian politics it also demonstrates **intersectional inclusion**, bringing citizens from all backgrounds together as a start to a more "unified front," something that interviewees referenced as one of the most important aspects of these new "challenger" parties in Lebanon.

## Participatory Decision-Making

Mimicking the activist movements that overtook the streets throughout the sanitation mobilizations — where younger and older generations of both men and women came together across sectarian lines in open public forums to discuss and debate political and economic futures — Sabaa works to maintain an open and participatory party. Both younger and older members of the party are members of the party's organizational body, "the executive committee," and the younger members have a large say in the decisions made by the party. This is important as it gives the younger members — who were really the drivers of change in the political behavior of many Lebanese citizens — an ability to meaningfully participate in the decision-making process.

## Intergenerational Cooperation

Younger and older people who participated in the protests against the waste crisis, also known as the “rubbish” protests, came together with the hopes of changing the Lebanese political system for good. The Sabaa party follows this perspective by bringing together older professionals and professors and energetic and innovative young people to form a party built across generational lines. This allows for all generations to be represented and active in a movement that seeks to change Lebanese politics for all, not just the older or younger generations.

Building on their personal experiences and expertise, older members of Sabaa bring historical knowledge and professionalism that enables the party to connect with foreign leaders and to further a sense of legitimacy. Younger members bring with them their knowledge of today’s young people, the challenges they face, and a tenacity for responsive and sustainable change. Young Sabaa members are innovative and invested in the future of the country, a fact recognized by the older members, who respect and champion youth’s inclusion. One member’s comments really demonstrate this point. In an interview, she stated, “It is our responsibility to prepare young people, they are very intelligent [ . . . ] they are really amazing. In Sabaa we are working on them. And we know that someday the country will be governed by young people. Maybe now we can help them to get the power; it is important for us to let them get to the power.”

Sabaa demonstrates how the continuous efforts of the party members to work with one another and to provide meaningful access to power for all generations is an important model.

## Intersectional Inclusion

In addition to bringing together individuals across generations, Sabaa — and other new “challenger” movement parties — demonstrates post-sectarian politics. This is important as Lebanon’s political system has operated within the frame of representational sectarian politics since the end of the country’s brutal civil war in 1989 (Sune, 2011). Building momentum from the “rubbish” protests, the party maintains both membership and inclusion of the views of all sects and aims to contribute to bringing together the Lebanese in a “united front” against the old, sectarian elites.

This is important as many in the country are dissatisfied with the sectarian system and feel the corruption and lack of checks and balances on the few elite families is the cause of the country’s misfortunes. As a result, the mindset of how Lebanese politics should be organized has shifted; rather than seeing party flags in support of the old elite (based on religious sects), now young and old Lebanese citizens alike wave Lebanese flags (Holtmeier, L., 2020). In bringing together younger and older Lebanese across the sectarian lines, the party is both representative of the wants and desires of the larger population and a different future for Lebanon.

## LESSONS FROM SABAA

The Sabaa party in Lebanon is emblematic of the potential for change within political parties when younger and older people come together to change the status quo within the political system. Moving from the streets to small party offices across the country, the party emphasizes inclusivity, both sectarian and generational, in its decision-making processes. Further, it emphasizes the importance of mutual respect and trust. Young and old members of the party have equal say in decisions, making Sabaa not only a youth-led and founded party, but one that has the support and respect of older members of Lebanese society. As movements shift from the streets to formal spaces for participation, the ideas and perspectives of its members are often lost as a result of co-optation. In the case of Sabaa, younger and older party members demonstrate that when intergenerational and intersectional cooperation and respect are employed, a party can have great impact. In the case of Lebanon, this has both shifted perspectives and demonstrated a change in the ideology everyone is used to (Azhari, T., 2020).

## Tunisia: The Rise of Independent Candidates, 3ich (Aich) Tounsi



Young Tunisians have a long history of protests and other forms of social movement activism. Ten years after their Arab Spring, young Tunisians still mobilize for the changes they wish to see in their society. The past decade has been tumultuous for the country, including a revolution, transitions in presidential and legislative powers, rampant corruption and high unemployment rates. Among young people, unemployment is roughly 36 percent (Speakman Cordall, 2021), in addition to a growing mistrust of the political class (Yerkes, 2020). On nearly all economic indicators, including youth unemployment, regional marginalization, and inflation, Tunisia's economy has declined since 2010, when the democratic revolution began (Yerkes, 2020). This has translated into a deep dissatisfaction among Tunisians toward their government and political parties. In 2019, approximately 75 percent of Tunisians felt as though the members of parliament “do ‘nothing’ to address their needs” and another “41 percent rated the government’s performance as ‘very bad’” (Yerkes, 2020).

Against this backdrop, young people have continued their mobilizations against a political class they feel has left them and other Tunisians behind. Demonstrations in 2020 highlight the demands of young Tunisians who have been among the most impacted by the COVID-19-related economic downturn in the country. Yet, while many are taking to the streets, some are also seeking political office. 3ich (Aich) Tounsi or “Live Tunisian,” was founded as a “citizen movement” in April 2018 by Olfa Terras Rambourg, a wealthy French-Tunisian philanthropist. The 3ich Tounsi association is known for its bright yellow T-shirts, its slogan “Don’t be afraid, we’re not a political party” and its support for independent political candidates. In the 2019 election cycle, the dissatisfaction felt by many Tunisians toward the traditional parties — approximately 80 percent — led to a large increase in the number of independent candidates, which make up about 33 percent of the roughly 15,000 candidates running across 1,500 lists (Erdoos, 2019), some of whom are members of the 3ich Tounsi association.

3ich Tounsi has made waves in the Tunisian political sphere through its widespread campaign efforts and approximately 450,000-person survey. The association grew out of the philanthropic **Rambourg Foundation**, which serves to promote civic engagement and political efficacy (AFP, 2019), especially among the country’s lagging regions where social exclusions remain high (Dahmani, 2019; Jemail, 2015). 3ich Tounsi stresses that it is an association, not a political party, that seeks to support the wants and needs of Tunisians, which includes supporting candidates for political office. Despite some confusion over its purpose or ideology, 3ich Tounsi has brought forward new political candidates and promoted young people’s inclusion in Tunisian politics (Tanit, 2019; Dahmani, 2019).

One of their more promising strategies as an association has been the “national consultation,” which sought to connect directly to the Tunisian people using a mass survey. The citizen’s survey and consultation enabled an **inclusive platform** that not only garnered support for the cause, but allowed the association to forward a program of candidates — including some of the country’s most loved artists and actors — that met the demands and needs of the population (Mersch, 2019). Additionally, the association has been successful in maintaining its status as an association, not a political party. Rather than selecting candidates — as traditional parties do — 3ich Tounsi supports and **backs independent candidates** who support its aims and goals.

### Inclusion in Voicing Demands

In the year leading up to its backing of several independent candidates, the 3ich Tounsi movement organized a mass campaign to survey a large portion of Tunisians. Over the course of the survey, the association traveled and made phone calls to roughly 400,000 Tunisians spread across the entire country. Responses from 24 governorates and 127 delegations were recorded and subsequently synthesized into a list of 12 demands/

issues (Dahmani, 2019). The list was then translated into a manifesto that was put forward to the Tunisian public for approval in 2019, enabling the association to back independent candidates in the election.

Some of the issues on the list included (Dahmani, 2019):

- Abolishing the privileges of the political class, which can be understood as special rights, and ending decision-making power reserved only for political elites;
- Increasing police protection of Tunisians;
- Guaranteeing access to necessary medical treatments including access to essential medications;
- Combating rising inflation and prices; and
- Imposing transparency and equal access to employment.

In organizing the survey, the inclusion of diverse perspectives from across the country and wide support for the manifesto among the public provided legitimacy for the 3ich Tounsi association and for the candidates running with their support.

## Candidate Support, Not Nomination

3ich Tounsi remains committed to its role as an association, not a political party, and is fervent about this distinction. Unlike traditional political parties — which have large, often hierarchical structures and sometimes strict candidate selection rules — the 3ich Tounsi movement supports individuals who align with its cause and who seek public office. The association, following the guidelines of the Tunisian electoral system, presented a list of candidates in all 33 electoral districts (Derbali, 2019). Although fielding a “candidate list” has caused some concerns about their ability to remain an association and not a political party, and concern from leaders of traditional political parties, this model may be an avenue for youth-focused organizations to make political inroads.

### LESSONS FROM 3ICH TOUNSI

The 3ich Tounsi association has shaken up Tunisia’s political sphere by denouncing the exclusion of young people and the government’s inability to meet the demands of its people. Their efforts to support candidates who align with the demands of the Tunisian population while remaining a political association point to an innovative way to increase legitimacy in a context where many feel disillusioned and untrustworthy of political institutions. However, 3ich Tounsi underperformed in the 2019 elections, gaining only five seats in parliament. While their model engaged young people throughout the election cycle and helped them perform well in pre-election polls, it was still difficult to get voters to the polls. The association’s inclusive practices and the use of Tunisians’ perspectives and demands to build an election manifesto were novel in the region and for many Tunisians demonstrated the association’s commitment to remedying their plight. This is significant when so many demand transparency and equality from their political institutions.



