



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Main takeaways

Engaging Youth in Democracy: Empowering the Next Generation

The IPU hosted a [webinar on 18 March 2025](#) that brought together parliamentarians and civil society leaders to discuss practical steps for empowering young people in democratic processes. Moderated by Mr. Milton Dick, Speaker of the House of Representatives of Australia, the discussion explored innovative approaches to meaningful youth engagement in politics.

The challenge

The democratic disconnect between traditional political institutions and young citizens presents a significant challenge worldwide. While today's youth remain politically active and engaged on issues they care about, they often feel excluded from formal democratic processes. As the moderator noted, in Australia, trust in political parties sits at just 34%, among the lowest of all institutions. This reflects a broader global trend where traditional parliamentary structures and political discourse fail to resonate with younger generations, who prefer more direct, digital, and collaborative forms of participation.

Key insights from speakers

Mr. Milton Dick (Speaker, House of Representatives, Australia) has embarked on a mission to improve youth engagement in democracy, visiting over 154 schools nationwide to teach students about parliamentary functions. He has established a national youth parliament where young people from across the country can represent their communities, giving them a platform to discuss issues affecting their futures.

Mr. Jamyang Namgyal, the youngest member of Bhutan's National Council, described his country's initiatives including a Citizens Engagement Platform and Youth Initiative for debate, deliberation and dialogue where MPs directly engage with young people. Bhutan has focused on making parliamentary proceedings more accessible through reduced bureaucratic barriers and the use of social media platforms to help young people better understand and participate in democratic discourse.

Mr. David Stögmüller (National Council of Austria) highlighted Austria's progressive approach, including lowering the voting age to 16 to encourage early political participation.

Austria conducts youth parliament simulations where students collaborate with real MPs on legislative proposals. Mr. Stögmüller emphasized the importance of bringing more young parliamentarians into international organizations to ensure youth perspectives are represented in global governance.

Mr. Samson Itodo (Executive Director, YIAGA Africa) shared his experience leading the successful *Not Too Young to Run* campaign in Nigeria, which lowered the eligibility age for parliamentary candidates from 35 to 25. He emphasized the importance of establishing youth caucuses in parliaments as entry points for young leaders and advocated strongly for youth quotas, citing successful implementation in Rwanda, The Gambia and Uganda.

Breaking down barriers

Hostile political discourse was identified as a significant deterrent to youth participation in politics. The confrontational nature of parliamentary debates creates an unwelcoming environment for young people considering political careers. This hostility disproportionately impacts young women, who face additional gender-based barriers when engaging in political spaces. The Bhutanese Parliament was highlighted as exemplary for maintaining respectful discourse based on the principle of “agreeing to disagree” without resorting to shouting or personal attacks.

Structural obstacles continue to limit youth representation in many parliaments worldwide. Age requirements for candidacy often explicitly exclude young people, as demonstrated by Nigeria’s previous requirement that citizens be 40 years old before running for president. Political party structures frequently favour established members and lack pathways for youth advancement. These barriers often compound for young women, who also face intersecting challenges related to both age and gender when seeking political roles.

Connecting with young people

Meeting youth on their preferred platforms emerged as a crucial strategy for parliamentary engagement. Speakers highlighted successful initiatives where parliaments maintained active social media accounts with content created by young staff who understand youth communication styles. These digital strategies help demystify parliamentary proceedings and make legislative work more accessible.

Simplifying parliamentary language and processes was identified as essential for meaningful youth engagement. Speakers emphasized reducing bureaucratic barriers and translating complex legislative procedures into formats that young people can easily understand, including illustrative videos and AI-powered tools like chatbots to answer questions about legislation.

Balancing digital and in-person engagement was stressed as critical for authentic connection. While digital platforms provide important access points, speakers emphasized that parliamentarians must still engage directly with young people in schools, universities and community settings, particularly by visiting constituencies rather than expecting youth to come to parliament buildings.

Recommendations for parliamentarians

The webinar concluded with five key recommendations for parliamentarians seeking to enhance youth engagement:

1. **Reform structural barriers** by lowering age requirements for candidates and establishing youth quotas in parliaments and political parties.
2. **Create formal youth mechanisms** such as youth caucuses and committees with dedicated resources to advance youth policy agendas.
3. **Modernize parliamentary communication** by using digital platforms and simplified language that resonates with younger generations.
4. **Engage directly with young people** through school visits, youth parliaments and community outreach rather than expecting them to approach institutions.
5. **Foster respectful political discourse** that models constructive debate and creates a welcoming environment for youth participation, with particular attention to making politics less hostile for young women.

The discussion underscored that meaningful youth engagement required more than symbolic representation. Parliaments must provide substantive opportunities for young people to influence decision-making processes that affect their futures. At the conclusion of the webinar, the moderator encouraged all participants to join the IPU's [*I Say Yes to Youth in Parliament!*](#) campaign as a practical step toward building a coalition to amplify youth voices in democratic institutions worldwide.