



Bridging the Divide: Building Partnerships Between Youth & Political Parties

Young women and men under the age of 30 make up over half of the world's population. At a time when extreme global inequality is increasing, young people remain disproportionately impacted by socio-economic instability and face a myriad of challenges such as displacement, migration, and limited access to education and employment opportunities. They express frustration with leaders and institutions that they perceive to be inaccessible, incapable, unresponsive, corrupt and repressive. Despite perceptions that young people are more apathetic than older generations, recent events have seen young women and men play leading roles in political demonstrations around the world. Many of these young people are shunning formal, political institutions and organizing on their own terms; they are more likely to mobilize around specific issues through social media and loosely-defined movements. These young men and women remain politically interested: they are simply less inclined to become members of formal political institutions.

However, turning away from political parties and other formal institutions comes with a cost. These institutions, especially political parties, continue to play central roles 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 the same traditional opportunities for engagement will only appeal to limited numbers of young people, leaving large segments of the youth demographic excluded from and disengaged in formal politics.

Increasing political participation among youth has been a longstanding component of democracy and governance assistance. Previous programming has heavily focused on strengthening youth participation in traditional, formal processes and institutions. This has included efforts to equip young people with political leadership skills and strengthen party youth wings or other methods of party outreach to youth. This type of programming is most likely to appeal to young people who are predisposed to engage in formal processes and institutions. Research suggests that increasingly, this is at odds with the forms of participation that are most likely to appeal to the majority of young people. Bridging the divide between young people and political parties requires new strategies that recognize young people's legitimate concerns about formal institutions and the different ways in which young men and women want to organize politically. It also requires political parties to meet young people where they are. In response to these emerging trends, a new NDI initiative is examining:

- Youth disaffection and its potential implications for democracy support;
- The contextual factors to consider in identifying strategic entry points for meaningful collaboration between young people and political institutions;
- The types of actors best suited to serve as interlocutors between young people and political institutions; and
- The types of interventions and/or programming that could help bridge the gap between young people and political institutions.

This initiative will produce new guidance that assists youth-led organizations and democracy practitioners in better bridging the gap between young people and democratic institutions. For more information about this initiative, please contact Rachel E. Mims (rmims@ndi.org) & Christian Brunner (cbrunner@ndi.org).