

# 144TH IPU ASSEMBLY: CRITICAL REFLECTION ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN INDONESIA'S DEMOCRACY

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CRITICAL REFLECTION ON YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN INDONESIA'S  
DEMOCRACY**

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**Introduction**

Did you know that Indonesia hosted the 144th IPU (Inter-Parliamentary Union) Assembly on 20–24 March 2022? The IPU is a global organization of international parliaments. In Nusa Dua City, Bali, yesterday's event was themed “Getting to Zero: Mobilizing Parliaments to Act on Climate Change” and was attended by 178 IPU country members and 14 associations. With this big theme, IPU seeks global issues through diplomacy and parliamentary dialogue to strengthen the position of representative institutions that are able to serve the people for peace and development.

For many years, there has been little evidence of young people's involvement in solving global problems. Furthermore, youth are seen as "stakeholders" who can further the discussion in a transparent manner and uphold democratic values. Just over a quarter (26 percent) of the world's population is under the age of 30 and only 2.6 percent of them are represented in the House of Representatives' Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Agency (BKSAP). We need representatives of young people to oversee issues related to sustainability from the perspective of economic, social, and environmental aspects. Through participation, youth will be involved in goal setting, resource allocation, and program implementation. This will be an opportunity for youth to improve their personality, knowledge, and practical skills in exercising their rights as citizens and contributing to a more democratic society (Checkoway, 2011).

**Lack of youth involvement in formal democracy**

In reality, youth are still way behind and severely under-represented in parliament. Based on age, data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2022) shows that the percentage of DPR RI members is still dominated by members aged 51-60 years (36.8%), followed by 41-50 years (34.1%). Meanwhile, youth members of parliament with an age range of 23-40 years are still minor with a percentage of 12.5% of the total members of the DPR RI. This is contradictory to the fact that Indonesia consists of 31.3% of youth aged 20-39 years (BPS, 2019). Moreover, the youth participation in parliament has worsened over the years shown by the number of DPR

members under the age of 40 has decreased by 3.5% from the previous parliamentary period which reached 16% (DPR-RI, 2019).

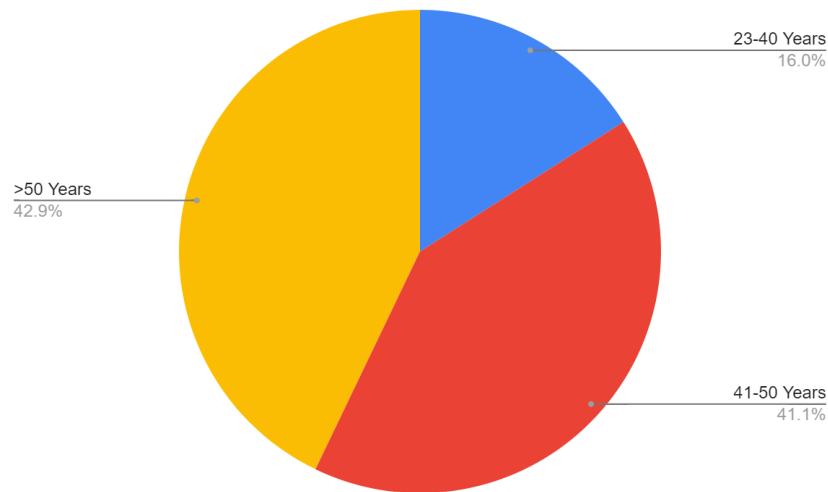


Figure 1. Percentage of DPR RI members by age in 2014-2019

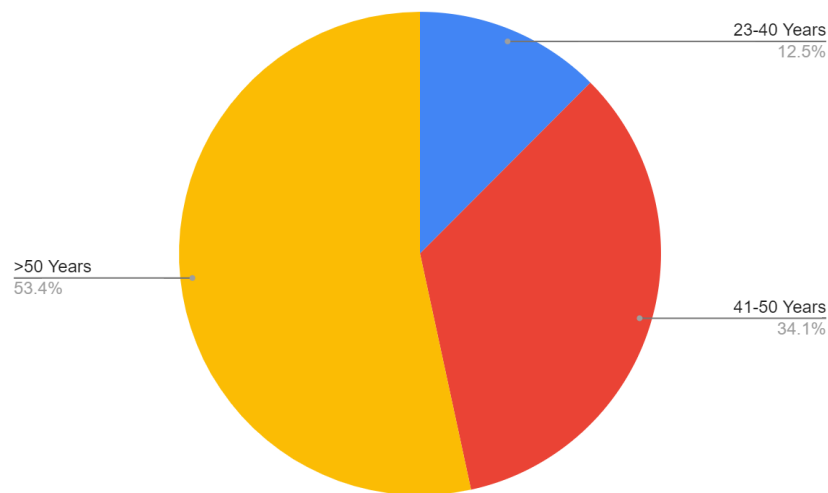


Figure 2. Percentage of DPR RI members by age in 2019-2024

Why does this happen? There are three main reasons for the lack of youth involvement in the Indonesian parliament which are,

1. Tokenism, namely the placement of youth who are still limited to being tokens or symbols in politics and often has a related implication with the oligarch and elites.
2. Apathy, namely the indifference of youth in the political realm. Based on CSIS Report (2017), The 144th IPU Assembly (2022) states that only 2.3% of the millennial generation are interested in socio-political issues.

3. Representation, namely the still in the power of the older generation or the gerontocracy. As a result, the role of youth intervention is still lacking.

Tokenism, apathy, and representation are caused by several things. First, youth want to be politically involved, but mainstream structures to participate are increasingly unattractive to youth. Second, adult-led agendas and structures tend to prioritize adult knowledge over youth values, agendas, and priorities, and exert control over the forms and styles of democratic engagement. Third, the emergence of non-formal and informal forms of involvement in democracy enables youth to act on the closest issues and have a real impact (Henn and Foard, 2012; Rainsford, 2014a in Percy-Smith et al., 2019). Many youths are not interested in joining parliament because politics is a closed world and does not have a direct impact on social issues. As a result, youth are more interested in participating informally or non-formally through humanitarian communities which have a direct impact on resolving issues that are more important and close (Stolle et al., 2008).

Critical reflection: Zero reasons for youth not to participate in democracy (formal or informal)

One of us had the opportunity to represent youth in the 144th Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly forum held in Bali, Indonesia. Made Naraya, attended as the favorite member of the Youth Parliament Program called *Parlemen Remaja*, which is an educational program organized by the DPR RI to teach young generations about politics and democracy accordingly to the nation's noble values. On this occasion, we not only introduced the Youth Parliament Program to the international delegates but also observed every process of IPU Activities mainly on its youth engagement.

The IPU Forum is very concerned about the aspirations of the younger generation. Therefore, the IPU created an exclusive forum for young parliamentarians called the Forum of Young Parliamentarians. There, the young MPs gave their views on every agenda discussed at the meeting, from climate change to the Russia-Ukraine war. After obtaining a consensus, the head of the Forum of Young Parliamentarians had the opportunity to speak before the General Assembly to represent the views of the younger generation. In our view, this platform has strived to ensure that young people's voices are heard in global decision-making processes to help transform inputs into outcomes.

However, as a group that dominates the world's population, youth participation must continue to be increased considering the fact that only less than two percent of parliamentarians are under the age of 30. The IPU saw this reality and created a global campaign to support an

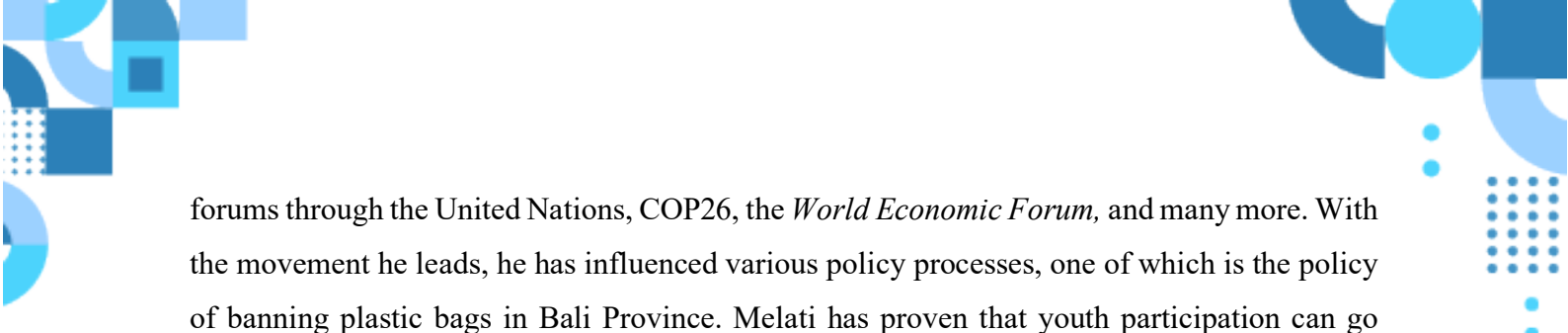
increase in the number of young people in parliament called “I Say Yes for Youth in Parliament”. Through this program, we are invited to say yes to the representation of the younger generation in parliament.

The experience in the 144th IPU Assembly as an international democracy forum finally provides a valid picture of how youth could involve in a formal decision-making process. The political barrier for young men and women is still huge in Indonesia, although there is already a perspective regarding youth as agents of change. This will lead to policies that are less visionary because they do not take into account the voices of youth. As stated by Ansell et al (2017), collaboration with impacted groups is essential in the *policy design* to achieve successful policy execution. If so, isn't the younger generation the group that will be most directly impacted by the policies that are being decided now? Hence, youth have the right to be included in political decision-making.

In formal channels, the representation of Indonesian youth is still in crisis and urgently needs to be improved. The Indonesia Youth Parliament Program is a very potential forum to accommodate the best young people from all over Indonesia to participate in democracy. From our perspective who got the chance to introduce Indonesia Youth Parliament at the IPU assembly, there are many member parliamentarians who supported this program. At the same time, we met with young people from the Namibian delegation who had the same program as the Indonesian Youth Parliament. Amazingly, they have the opportunity to be directly involved in providing advice to parliament in formulating policies related to youth. They also had the opportunity to attend and involve in the Forum of Young Parliamentarians and other meetings at the IPU.

The hope is that the Youth Parliament of Indonesia can also be like the Youth Parliament of Namibia, which not only gets an education about parliament but also becomes a forum for voicing the aspirations of young people in parliament. Indonesia still has three major problems in youth participation in parliament, namely tokenism, apathy, and representation. With the increasing interest of the younger generation in the Indonesian Youth Parliament, the increased institutional involvement of this program can be a solution to mitigate these three problems.


On the other hand, young people are also not inferior in informal channels. Even at the opening of the trial, the IPU invited an environmental activist named Melati Wijssen to give a speech voicing the aspirations of young Indonesians. Melati Wijssen is a young person who really cares about youth activism. Informally, he has been fighting for the environment through the *Bye Bye Plastic Bags* and *Youthopia movements*. But formally, his voice is heard in global



forums through the United Nations, COP26, the *World Economic Forum*, and many more. With the movement he leads, he has influenced various policy processes, one of which is the policy of banning plastic bags in Bali Province. Melati has proven that youth participation can go beyond the barriers of formal and informal channels.

### **Conclusion**

Youth is the future of democracy. Youth can (and should) take part, either formally, i.e. through conferences, elections, sessions, etc., as well as non-formally, simply through civic education and facilitating social media that increase knowledge and experience (Ida, Saud, & Mashud, 2020; Saud, 2020). With the information and experience stories above, do you agree that Indonesian youth still have to try to involve and be involved for a better Indonesia? Have you done it? Which path do you choose, formal or informal?



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