

Global Public Policy Reactions to an Increasingly Political Young Generation

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Abstract

The successful introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 revolutionized the way countries regarded youth opinions, pushing for greater youth involvement in policymaking. Consequently, the Convention marked an era that saw the rise of youth parliaments (deliberative bodies of young citizens connecting youth members and policymakers), allowing for youth influence on lawmaking and policy development. From the late 20th century to the present, governments of ratifying states like the United Kingdom, Israel, South Korea, and New Zealand established youth parliaments with varying levels of legislative influence to fulfill the ideal that young people deserve representation in governmental proceedings. As is typical of government initiatives, these newly-established bodies faced intense scrutiny by the public, academics, and politicians. The United States, the only state to have not ratified the Convention, has no established youth policy or youth parliament. This essay reviews the history of youth parliaments, considers the merit of critiques of youth parliaments, and weighs whether the long-awaited ratification of the Convention by the United States of America and the implementation of a youth parliament (or variations) would impact American political culture or institutions. As will be shown, a youth parliament would shape a new era of intergenerational cooperation in the United States.

Introduction

In 1990, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a landmark treaty establishing youth rights as a global concern alongside issues like peace treaties, environmentalism, and humanitarianism. The CRC is one of the most ratified human rights treaties with 196 parties to the treaty including non-UN members like the State of Palestine and the Holy See.¹ Even partially recognized states such as Taiwan have incorporated the CRC into their laws and institutions.² Following the adoption of the CRC, an ‘unprecedented right of the child – the right of the child to be heard – ... has become [one] of fundamental importance worldwide.’³

Article 12 of the CRC is the defining and most revolutionary component of the Convention. It stipulates that:

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.⁴

By examining how state parties have applied the CRC, particularly Article 12, to policy and institutional reform, the significance of this provision becomes clearer.

The inclusion of youth in decision-making and policy-making directly aligns with to the introduction of the CRC into global culture. Article 12 triggered a widespread movement of youth participation in

¹ United Nations Treaty Collection, *UNTC* [website], https://treaties.un.org/pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&clang=_en#bottom, (accessed 1 June 2023).

² Child and Youth Welfare and Rights Promotion Group, *Implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Republic of China, 2017, 3-4.

³ A. Parkes, ‘Tokenism versus Genuine Participation: Children’s Parliaments and the Right of the Child to be Heard Under International Law’, *Willamette Journal of International Law and Dispute Resolution*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2008, 3.

⁴ United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations, New York, November 20, 1989.

government. UNICEF's Stephen Lewis⁵ was quoted in a speech he delivered to the Commission of Human Rights as saying:

The most powerful change wrought by the Convention [on the Rights of the Child] is the way in which children have become visible. ... civil society feel[s] a clear obligation to include children... You can't ignore children any longer and get away with it. The Convention has raised consciousness in a dramatic fashion.⁶

Youth participatory models in non-governmental bodies began to spread following the adoption of the CRC in 1990 after having undergone a 'slow, evolutionary process' since the 1980s.⁷ Post-CRC ratification, youth engagement on socio-political issues found new structures and institutional homes through charities, youth organizations, and, eventually, government bodies. Perfecting the niche for impactful youth participation became a goal for national governments; thus, the idea that would become youth parliaments began to form.

Creating youth participatory organizations and outlets requires an understanding of the various facets of the CRC and Article 12, especially the 'due weight' implication in Article 12(2) which asks state parties to place a quasi-formulaic emphasis on the maturity of the child in proportion to the views expressed. Laura Lundy of Queen's University proposes a model for applying Article 12 to the institutionalization of youth 'representative bodies,' as propounded in Article 12(2). Lundy's model prioritizes four key elements of youth participation under Article 12: space, voice, audience, and influence. Lundy summarizes each element, arguing that the elements for effective and impactful youth representation are:

Space: Children must be given the opportunity to express a view.

Voice: Children must be facilitated to express their views.

Audience: The view must be listened to.

Influence: The view must be acted upon, as appropriate.⁸

⁵ Lewis served as the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa (2001-2006), Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF (1995-1999), and as the Canadian Ambassador to the UN (1984-1988). Lewis holds 42 honorary doctorates, is a Companion of the Order of Canada, and was honored as a Knight Commander of the Most Dignified Order of Moshoeshoe in Lesotho by King Letsie III.

⁶ K. Dürr, "The School: A Democratic Learning Community. The All-European Study on Pupils Participation in School", *Pupils, Parents, Teachers - a democratic community* [website], <https://rm.coe.int/090000168097c7fe>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁷ E. Middleton, "Youth Participation in the UK: Bureaucratic Disaster or Triumph of Child Rights", *Children, Youth and Environments*, Vol. 16, No. 2, 2006.

⁸ L. Lundy, "Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child", *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 6, December 2007, 931-933.

For this essay, the representative bodies that fulfill the ideals of both CRC's Article 12 and the four elements identified by Lundy will be called 'youth parliaments.' Variations of this youth parliament title apply based on the terminology of the constituency. Youth councils, assemblies, and congresses are all variations of youth parliaments.

The emergence of youth parliaments has direct ties to Article 12 of the CRC and, more recently, CRC signatories have referenced their respective youth parliaments as manifestations of youth policy objectives.⁹ The CRC's broad ideals manifested in the ever-growing youth parliament movement. Take, for example, the United Kingdom and its introduction of a Youth Parliament by MP Andrew Rowe. On June 9, 1998, almost a decade after the adoption of the CRC, Rowe moved to establish the 'parliament of young people.'¹⁰ Rowe prefaced his parliamentary motion with three reasons as to why a British youth parliament ought to be established. Rowe argued young people should be consulted before laws affecting them are made; youths will inherit the nations they inhabit and deserve to have some say in their future inheritance; and including young people in policymaking would alleviate the voter apathy felt by youth in British society.¹¹ The arguments propounded by Rowe have distinct parallels to CRC Article 12.

Just as in the United Kingdom, other non-European nations implemented youth parliaments as a way of fulfilling the aims of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, as well as granting youth democratic participation that they lacked before. In 1991, Zimbabwe established the Junior Parliament of Zimbabwe to bring the voices of children into policymaking.¹² The Junior Parliament has impacted Zimbabwe. Multi-lateral dialogue between the Junior Parliament, the government of Zimbabwe, and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) led to productive conversations about nutrition and health in Zimbabwe.

⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'Combined sixth and seventh periodic reports submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 44 of the Convention, due in 2022', United Nations, 11 November 2022.

¹⁰ A. Rowe, *Hansard*, London, England, June 9, 1998.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² P. Katete et al., 'Promoting youth leadership on nutrition through junior parliamentarians and junior council engagement in Zimbabwe', *Field Exchange*, 2021, <https://www.ennonline.net/fex/66/promotingyouthleadership>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

Slovenia¹³ and New Zealand¹⁴ formed youth parliaments towards the end of the 20th century as well, establishing these groups in 1990 and 1994, respectively. The Republic of Ireland established its youth parliament, the Dáil na nÓg, in 2010, with a collective of several local youth groups collectively called the Comhairle na nÓg.¹⁵ South Africa introduced their version of a youth parliament in 2013 and, per a government statement, the South African government aims to create ‘an opportunity for the youth to engage with Parliament’.¹⁶

Youth parliaments sprung up around the world with globalist cooperation and inspiration driving signatories of the CRC, as well as subsidiary constituencies, to adopt structured programs to include youth. The development of youth parliaments at the national level drives regional youth parliaments and youth councils to form, including municipal youth councils in the United Kingdom¹⁷ and the Republic of Ireland,¹⁸ district youth councils in the State of Israel, and others.

As can be expected, the diverse policies and practices of CRC-ratifying states inform the development of each nation’s youth parliaments and their impact and abilities. Despite these variations, these youth parliaments share a common characteristic: their influence on government institutions. As previously established, ‘influence’ is a key element of effective youth representation under the provisions of the CRC. Influence – that youth parliamentary decisions are acted on by a larger deliberative body – is critical to ensuring the impact of youth within their country’s government. For example, an act by the Youth National Assembly of the Republic of Korea can be submitted to the National Assembly of Korea, the country’s unicameral legislature, for consideration. This influence has enabled the Youth National Assembly of the Republic of Korea to propose legislation that has included amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the Labor

¹³ Zveza Prijateljcev Mladine Slovenije, *Otroški parlamenti - Zveza prijateljev mladine Slovenije* [website], <https://www.zpms.si/programi/otroski-parlamenti/>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

¹⁴ Ministry of Youth Development, *Youth Parliament - MYD* [website], <https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-parliament/>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

¹⁵ Comhairle na nÓg, *What We Do | Comhairle na nÓg* [website], <https://www.comhairlenanog.ie/who-we-are/what-we-do/>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

¹⁶ South African Government, *Parliament launches Youth Parliament* [website], <https://www.gov.za/parliament-launches-youth-parliament>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

¹⁷ Bradford-Keighley Youth Parliament, *How BKYP Works* [website], <https://web.archive.org/web/20120304012018/http://www.bkyp.com/how-bkyp-works.php>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

¹⁸ Comhairle na nÓg, *What We Do | Comhairle na nÓg* [website], <https://www.comhairlenanog.ie/who-we-are/what-we-do/>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

Standards Act, and the Framework Act on Education, as well as the introduction of the Guarantee of Student Human Rights Act.¹⁹

In essence, the continuous development of youth parliaments represents a new paradigm in youth policy internationally. The inclusion of youth voices comes at a crucial time. As the global population grows so does the youth population but older politicians disproportionately hold positions of power compared to younger people. Ideological differences and different socio-economic realities have historically caused political conflict,²⁰ a fact which, if unaddressed, will become glaringly apparent. By establishing intergenerational cooperation on a host of issues, especially with people under the age of majority (the age of legal adulthood) and without the ability to vote, governments reform institutions to make government more accessible.

Critiques: Then and Now, by Politicians and by the Public, Academic, and Political

Reforms by the government, or any kind of institutional change for that matter, face scrutiny, criticism, praise, and general debate by politicians, academics, and the public. Various critiques grouped by topic follow, which examine the political and academic reactions to youth parliament models across the world.

Why Youth Only?

The most common criticism of youth parliaments is that they are redundant or unnecessary. Why should a specific demographic of the citizenry be given special access to the government? The theme recurs almost every time the UK Youth Parliament is invited for its annual sitting in the House of Commons. For context, the UK Youth Parliament was permitted to sit in the House of Lords in 2008. In March of 2009, Sir Chris Bryant, the Labour Party Deputy Leader of the House of Commons, moved to let the Youth Parliament ‘hold its 2009 annual meeting in the Chamber of this House [of Commons].’²¹ As the House of Commons debated the motion, Conservative MP Richard Bacon questioned if the Commons allowed any such sittings in their chamber, why would a board of ‘pensioners’ or older citizens not also be able to

¹⁹ The Youth National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, *History* [website], https://youthassembly.or.kr/bbs/board.php?bo_table=history, (accessed 1 June 2023).

²⁰ A. Foner, “Age Stratification and Age Conflict in Political Life,” *American Sociological Review*, Rutgers University, Vol. 29, April 1974.

²¹ C. Bryant, *Hansard*, London, England, 12 March 2009.

debate matters in the public eye?²² Deputy Leader Bryant retorted sardonically that, in consideration of the makeup of the House of Commons, older citizens already occupied the halls of Westminster Palace.

Although said in jest, this remark points to a harsh truth about the age representation in the existing government body. Youths coming of age in the first three decades of the 21st century are incredibly political and increasingly discontent with the status quo. Some commentators have described the current era of social tension and youth-driven rejection of norms as a new age of dissent in which the outspoken generation is vocally rejecting the ‘business-as-usual’ culture.²³ In the United States, the age of elected leaders does not reflect that of the average American. The average age of members of the US House of Representatives at the beginning of the 118th Congress was 57.9 years; the average age of Senators was 64.0 years.²⁴ In contrast, per the 2021 US Census, the median age in the United States is 38.8.²⁵

Youth parliaments, as previously established, serve the populations addressed by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The CRC defines ‘child’ as one under the age of eighteen or the age of majority if the age of majority is lower than eighteen.²⁶ Therefore, youth parliaments are the only bodies that represent a majority of a nation’s unenfranchised citizens. Other groups that cater to specific religious sects, ethnic groups, employees, or nationalities cannot claim the same status as a youth parliament.

Six years after the initial debate on the motion to let the Youth Parliament sit in the UK House of Commons, another debate was held on the same topic with similar speaking points. Conservative MP and then-Deputy Leader of the House of Commons Dr. Thérèse Coffey presented a practically identical motion for consideration by the members of the Commons. She, on behalf of herself, the Leader of the House of Commons, the shadow Leader of the House, and the Scottish National Party’s shadow Leader of the House argued for another sitting of the Youth Parliament in the chambers of the House of Commons.

²² R. Bacon, *Hansard*, London, England, 12 March 2009.

²³ K. O’Brien et al., ‘Exploring youth activism on climate change: dutiful, disruptive, and dangerous dissent,’ *Ecology and Society*, Vol, 23, No. 3, October 2018, 41.

²⁴ J. Manning, ‘Membership of the 118th Congress: A Profile,’ *Congressional Research Service*, 13 March 2023.

²⁵ US Census Bureau, *Nation Continues to Age as It Becomes More Diverse* [website], <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2022/population-estimates-characteristics.html>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

²⁶ United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Philip Davies, a Conservative MP, opposed the motion because the Youth Parliament should not be given ‘a separate rule’ when it comes to the ability to sit in the benches of the Commons.²⁷ Fellow Conservative MP Tim Loughton countered, saying that ‘Members of the UK Youth Parliament... do not have the opportunity to vote or stand in elections.’²⁸

The argument that youth parliaments are unnecessary or redundant disintegrates upon analysis of facts and statistics. ‘Why youth only?’ is the question. To be frank, youth are the only persons within the borders of a democratic nation with no guaranteed recourse to be heard without the ideals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Youth parliaments provide a method for young people to convey their opinions and beliefs to governments that have, for decades, dismissed young populations as dissenters, radicals, or immature and underdeveloped miscreants.

The Difficulty of Choosing Delegates

Representative government has always faced criticism about how representatives are chosen, and youth parliaments are no different. Elections by peers, elections by local youth councils, appointments by legislators, tests, exams, and training; are all methods of choosing members of youth parliaments. No system is universally or unanimously acclaimed but, instead, complaints about the selection of youth parliament members abound. It is entirely understandable to have reservations about the selection process for a quasi-governmental institution with significant influence. As most youth parliament members are youth under eighteen who lack the education held by actual elected officials and almost certainly lack the education of the average citizen, these reservations can be well founded.

Dr. Aisling Parkes of the Willamette University College of Law critiques various youth parliament electoral techniques for the *Willamette Journal of International Law and Dispute Resolution*.²⁹ She writes that direct, transparent, democratic elections like that of the Scottish Youth Parliament fulfill many of the democratic goals of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Scottish Youth Parliament is open to members aged fourteen to twenty-five,³⁰ an age range not supported by the CRC

²⁷ P. Davies, *Hansard*, 23 June 2015.

²⁸ T. Loughton, *Hansard*, 23 June 2015.

²⁹ A. Parkes, ‘Tokenism versus Genuine Participation: Children’s Parliaments and the Right of the Child to be Heard Under International Law,’ 3.

³⁰ Scottish Youth Parliament, *SYP Elections 2023* [website], <https://syp.org.uk/get-involved/elections/>.

which considers a child to be under eighteen.³¹ The lack of representation of youth under fourteen and the inclusion of adults who have attained the Scottish age of majority is in conflict, or at the least, discord with the CRC, a fact Parkes notes.

Alternatively, Parkes notes that the Junior Parliament in Zimbabwe requires a speech-writing and public-speaking competition to help choose members. Zimbabwe boasts one of the highest literacy rates in the English language among African nations but less-educated and non-English-speaking young Zimbabweans are entirely prevented from becoming junior parliamentarians because of the academic competition. The subjectivity of skills-based admissions processes leads to confusion and inconsistency, writes Parkes.

New Zealand utilizes a unique system of delegate selection. Individual constituencies of the New Zealand Parliament appoint youth members with various methods including peer voting, selection by the area's Member of Parliament, or skills-based competitions akin to those in Zimbabwe.³² The lack of a cohesive selection strategy could create confusion.

The process to become a Youth Parliament member in South Africa is considered exclusionary and non-democratic by many South African youths. A report by the South African Institute of International Affairs argues that the process, in which political parties select youth to represent them, is pure tokenism and amounts to little meaningful change.³³ By selecting youth on the basis of ideology, members of the South African Youth Parliament feel compelled to echo the beliefs of its adult counterparts rather than authentically representing South African youth.

Fighting Tokenism Through the Lundy and Lansdown Models

As youth parliaments are given sizeable influence and media coverage,³⁴ adults attempting to indirectly influence the processes of government find impressionable youth parliament members as eager

³¹ United Nations General Assembly, Convention on the Rights of the Child.

³² Ministry of Youth Development, *Youth Parliament 2019* [website], <https://www.myd.govt.nz/young-people/youth-parliament/youth-parliament-2019.html#YouthParliament2019Participants2>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

³³ South African Institute of International Affairs, 'Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa 2020/2021,' 1 May 2021, 19-20.

³⁴ J. Kenny et al., 'UK Youth Parliament: Get involved, says Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle,' *BBC*, 10 November 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-63575058>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

targets for manipulation. As was previously mentioned, South African Youth Parliament members find themselves being encouraged or forced into the ideological constraints of an adult-majority party.³⁵ Youth are impressionable and susceptible to the influence of an older role model, especially if that role model is a politician who tapped them to represent their country.

Per the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, tokenism is defined as the ‘practice of making only a symbolic effort [to do something]’.³⁶ In the scope of youth participation in decision-making, tokenism can be found when any of the four elements of youth representation are denied. As a review, the ‘Lundy model’ of children’s participation in decision-making includes four key concepts: space, voice, audience, and influence. This model, adopted by the European Commission^{37,38}, the World Health Organization,³⁹ World Vision,⁴⁰ and UNICEF⁴¹, provides a framework through which institutions can fight tokenism in youth participatory bodies.

Gerison Lansdown, an international children’s rights consultant, proposes another model for understanding youth participation levels. Lansdown recognizes three processes: a consultative process, a participatory process, and a self-initiated process.⁴² In a consultative process, adult decision-makers consult youth, acknowledging that, as adults, they lack a complete perspective. This adult-initiated process does not allow children to control outcomes as adults still hold all the power. The participatory process allows children to develop, implement, monitor, and evaluate projects and programs. Similarly, this process is

³⁵ South African Institute of International Affairs, ‘Youth Submission to the APRM in South Africa 2020/2021,’ 19-20.

³⁶ Merriam-Webster, *tokenism* [website], <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tokenism>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

³⁷ European Commission, *Child participation in political and democratic life* [website], https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/rights-child/child-participation-political-and-democratic-life_en, (accessed 1 June 2023).

³⁸ European Commission, *Lundy Model of Participation and Lundy Voice Model Checklist* [website], https://commission.europa.eu/document/e4dd1d64-473b-4a2a-9de2-e2e1648fd52d_en, (accessed 1 June 2023).

³⁹ World Health Organization, *How young people can engage in global health and development* [website], <https://www.who.int/news-room/spotlight/coming-of-age-adolescent-health/adolescence---global-health-development>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁴⁰ P. Cuevas-Parra, ‘Children and Young People’s Participation,’ World Vision, 12.

⁴¹ G. Lansdown, ‘Conceptual Framework for Measuring Outcomes of Adolescent Participation,’ UNICEF, March 2018, 8.

⁴² G. Lansdown, ‘Can you hear me? The right of young children to participate in decisions affecting them,’ Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague, The Netherlands, May 2005.

adult-initiated but allows youth to influence and review outcomes and methods. The process that gives children the greatest autonomy is the self-initiated process in which issues are identified by children and discussed by children, in which adults are facilitators rather than leaders, and in which youth control the operations. Youth parliaments, youth councils, and other Article 12 bodies float between these three processes. There are valid criticisms of all processes including that only consulting youth is tokenistic or that letting them run things is entrusting youth with too much responsibility. Under the ‘due weight’ implication of Article 12, institutions must consider whether they are hindering the voices of youth or uplifting them.

It is also important to note that adults have previously assumed, and presumably continue to assume, the opinions of youth and only include them for tokenism. A member of the Children and Youth Board of the United Kingdom’s Department for Education and Skills expressed concern when a young person on the aforementioned board stated that they were simply tokenistic choices. The young person complained that decisions were made before they were brought into the fold.⁴³ Referring back to the model proposed by Lundy in ‘Voice’ Is Not Enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,’ the relationship between influence and audience is interrupted by tokenism. Lundy argues that the right to have views given due weight is derived from influence over policy and an audience of policymakers.⁴⁴ With this understanding, it is a violation of the CRC to deny the audience of youth (defined as the right to have their views heard) and the influence of youth (the right to have those views acted upon). By making decisions on behalf of youth but still claiming to include them, organizations and governments ignore the right of youth to have their views given due weight.

The process of participatory youth inclusion and expression is cyclical and multi-faceted. While youth parliaments are an outlet for Article 12 expression of views, if youth are not directly influencing the structure and operation of those youth parliaments, a hypocritical dilemma emerges. Feedback by youth, in a youth-accessible manner, for youth parliaments is critical for meaningful participatory democracy on behalf of youth.⁴⁵

⁴³ E. Middleton, “Youth Participation in the UK: Bureaucratic Disaster or Triumph of Child Rights”, 182.

⁴⁴ L. Lundy, “Voice’ is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child,’ 932

⁴⁵ A. Parkes, ‘Tokenism versus Genuine Participation: Children’s Parliaments and the Right of the Child to be Heard Under International Law,’ 20.

Studies show that ignoring the views of youth, or simply demonstrating that their actions result in little change, can both decrease youth self-esteem and prevent retention in a program.⁴⁶ To reject the tokenism that can be expected to occur, youth must be just as invested and listened to as there is continuous development in the model for participatory involvement as the youth would be speaking from said model or body for youth participation.

Government responses to youth parliaments and clear intent and willingness to listen to the voices of youth play a key part in establishing Article 12's rights to be heard. In 2001, following the first sitting of the UK, the Youth Parliament compiled its 'Youth Manifesto' and, since then, major parties in the United Kingdom have responded to the Youth Manifesto with their thoughts on major issues.⁴⁷ By taking the time to listen to and respond to the Youth Parliament, the parties of the United Kingdom provide the audience and influence that, together, give it due weight. This model of youth engagement with leaders demonstrates a willingness to listen and also gives youth the opportunity to meaningfully impact policy.

Youth parliaments across the globe have the ability to impact policy, giving them the element of influence that yields Article 12 fulfillment under the Lundy model. The State of Israel listened to its National Student and Youth Council and passed the Pupils' Rights Law in 2000, codifying student rights in Israeli education;⁴⁸ the law passed despite objections from the Ministry of Education, Members of the Knesset, and teachers' organizations. As previously discussed, the National Youth Assembly of Korea has the ability to introduce laws and has successfully done so over the few decades of its existence.⁴⁹ Youth parliaments are not limited to national legislation in terms of their impact, as a rejection of the appearance of tokenism. The UK Youth Parliament is noted by the Library of the House of Commons as being heard and listened to by the local government, various government

⁴⁶ K. O'Malley, 'Children and Young People Participating in PRSP Processes,' *Save the Children*, 2004, 2, 10.

⁴⁷ A. Babar, 'Political Parties respond to British Youth Council Manifesto,' *British Youth Council*, 20 April 2015, <https://www.byc.org.uk/news/political-parties-respond-to-british-youth-council-manifesto>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁴⁸ *The Student's Rights Act 2000* (Edu), <https://cms.education.gov.il/EducationCMS/Units/Zchuyot/ChukimVeamanot/Chukim/PupilsRightsLaw>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁴⁹ The Youth National Assembly of the Republic of Korea, *History* [website], https://youthassembly.or.kr/bbs/board.php?bo_table=history, (accessed 1 June 2023).

agencies, and even providers of services to young people like public transportation groups.^{50,51}

Overall, many youth parliaments in CRC party states make an earnest effort to avoid tokenism. There are, as expected, flaws in many of the systems in which youth make their voices heard. Politicians and academics alike find these flaws and ameliorate or exacerbate them. When youth parliaments include conversations about continuous development and about the continued implementation of the CRC, they ensure continued progress towards a more inclusive, accessible, and meaningful model of youth participation in decision-making. Global leadership by nations like the United Kingdom, Israel, the Republic of Ireland, the Republic of Korea, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, and countless others left undiscussed have aided and continue to aid in the universal adoption of youth parliamentary models. Signatories to the CRC continue to make efforts and actions that bring youth parliaments out from the shadow of tokenism and into the light of meaningful, effective, and impactful youth participation in decision-making.

Youth Politics in the United States from the Later 19th Century to the Present

The United States of America maintains a complicated relationship with its youth, a relationship that causes strife and tension between younger generations and older generations. The root of this tension is the inability of youth to have the views expressed and given due weight because, unlike every other country in the world, the United States has neither ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child nor implemented its own guarantees of student rights. Throughout the course of roughly a century and a half, from the Civil War and Reconstruction era to the present, youth established themselves as socio-political actors capable of forcing public perception and government action towards a more progressive, pro-youth stance. Internationally, youth have long been at the forefront of social justice and human rights movements,⁵² especially so in the United States.

⁵⁰ For example, Merseytravel, the public transport coordinator agency for the North West city of Liverpool, provides a unique transport ticket for fifteen to eighteen-year-olds for cheaper prices so young people can commute without a higher cost burden. Other localities across the United Kingdom have offered cheaper fares to young people following campaigns by youth councils and the UK Youth Parliament.

⁵¹ P. Lester et al., 'Youth Parliaments and young people's participation in politics,' House of Commons Library, 24 January 2007.

⁵² C. Petcu, 'Recognizing Youth as Peacebuilders,' *Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Programming with Colombia's Youth*, Stimson Center, 1 July 2020, 7.

The United States, along with other Western industrialized nations, continued to have widespread child labor into the twentieth century. The exposure of children to workplace politics and, more importantly, the blossoming labor movements of post-Reconstruction industrial America, proved to be a crucial factor in the organizing power of youth.

In 1888, women and girls went on strike against poor working conditions in a match factory in London. Although this event did not occur on American soil, the success of the match girls' strike marked the emergence of stronger, bolder female youth activism.⁵³ Such events in the United Kingdom spilled over to the United States where industrial unrest, driven by poorer working conditions, a rapidly-increasing wealth gap, and the emergence of leftist political ideologies like socialism and communism, created the perfect storm for a movement of youth organizing power to be born.

Just eleven years later, boys selling newspapers on the streets of New York City went on strike against some of the largest and most powerful media conglomerates in the United States in response to low pay. Industry giants like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst faced a rebellion from schoolboys. Newsboys took pride in the 'contradictory image' of being both exploited children and 'plucky entrepreneurs.'⁵⁴ The social reformers of the late 19th century and early 20th century immediately took offense to the idea of young boys laboring on the sides of the road. *The Encyclopedia of Strikes in American History* notes 'these [social reform] campaigns rarely involved the newsboys themselves, who often saw themselves as exploited but sought to redress the situation by negotiating for better terms.'⁵⁵

Applying both the Lundy and Lansdown models of youth participation in decision-making, it is clear that, although noble in cause, these social reform campaigns did not actively listen to youth and thus cannot be considered youth-involved movements. However, the youth-led aspects of organizing can be considered 'self-initiated' in the Lansdown model. The 1899 Newsboy Strike represented a youth-led movement for meaningful change. The initial leader of the strike was an eighteen-year-old and a vast majority of strikers were children per US legal standards and CRC definitions. In the Lansdown model, self-

⁵³ S. Koven, *The Match Girl and the Heiress*, Princeton University Press, 2014, 88, 100.

⁵⁴ J. Bekken, *The Encyclopedia of Strikes in American History*, M.E. Sharpe, 609

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 610

initiated youth participation campaigns yield better results, encourage greater involvement, and involve youth to the greatest extent.⁵⁶

Despite no formal institution or existing body for child laborers to express their views, attempts to establish both audience and influence, as defined in the Lundy model, persisted. The Newsboys Strike succeeded with this youth involvement and both strikers and media magnates negotiated for an acceptable deal. Labor organizing consisted of more than the industrial workers with socialist sympathies; labor organizing included the growing desire among youth for social change, a desire which spread outside of the workplace quickly.

As public-school enrollment increased in the post-Civil War era of American history, so too did youth movements in schools. Mirroring their industrial counterparts, students began to adopt striking tactics, cementing student protest as a standard part of history.⁵⁷ Student strikes continued into the late twentieth century in response to issues like teacher pay and school hours.⁵⁸ Even non-strike actions showed student resistance and a desire among youth to impact culture and decision-making in their community. ‘Gay/Straight Alliances’ became a simple, but effective, method of youth rebellion against established norms and policies by creating organizations that accepted and recognized queer youth in a rejection of the ‘subtle forms of homophobia [youth] experience[d] at school’.⁵⁹

Youth further demonstrated their intense desire to shape public policy and decision-making in the Civil Rights Era and in protests against the Vietnam War. Social justice movements from the late 20th century to the present showcase youth at the forefront of organizing. Dr. V.P. Franklin, Professor Emeritus of History at the University of California, notes that youth in the mid to late 20th century organized their own social justice campaigns before, during, and after the well-known civil

⁵⁶ G. Lansdown, ‘Can you hear me? The right of young children to participate in decisions affecting them.’

⁵⁷ Ivy, *We Don’t Need No Education*, <https://www.bklynlibrary.org/blog/2013/06/01/we-dont-need-no-education>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁵⁸ H. Sunderland, ‘Children’s strikes, school walk-outs, and youth political activism,’ *Doing History in Public*, 6 March 2018, <https://doinghistoryinpublic.org/2018/03/06/childrens-strikes-school-walk-outs-and-youth-political-activism/#comments>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁵⁹ W. Blumenfeld, ‘“Gay/Straight” Alliances: Transforming Pain to Pride,’ *The High School Journal*, Vol. 77, No. ½, *The Gay Teenager*, October/November 1993 - December 1993/January 1994, 113.

rights campaigns of SNCC,⁶⁰ SCLC, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. emerged.⁶¹

Youth participation in decision-making was not fully realized in the 19th and 20th centuries but the desire to be involved in decisions that affected policy and practice manifested itself through rebellion and resistance. Student strikes, in addition to youth-led and youth-organized groups, truly fulfill what Lansdown envisioned in the self-initiated process of her model for youth participation. The youth history of the United States shows a clear wish to establish itself in American institutions and yet youth have historically been denied the space, voice, audience, and influence required for meaningful impacts.

Role of Youth in Current US Institutions and Conflicts with the CRC

The United States has long opposed the Convention on the Rights of the Child, despite playing a critical role in the Convention's drafting, negotiation, and international adoption.⁶² The CRC shifted away from the perception of children 'as passive objects of the authority of parents and governments', a departure from longstanding US laws and customs that focus on adult rights.⁶³ The CRC would directly impact highly contentious laws in American culture including family law and reproductive rights;⁶⁴ for example, the Supreme Court has affirmed parents have the right to privacy and the liberty to 'establish a home and bring up children.'⁶⁵ Furthermore, medical decision-making and psychiatric commitment rules conflict with youth autonomy outlined in the CRC.⁶⁶ Despite the United States being a CRC signatory, American institutions and systems are at odds with the concepts in the CRC. Under current laws, American youth lack the rights and representation the CRC aims to codify.

⁶⁰ The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) was the principal organization through which youth organized during the American Civil Rights Movement.

⁶¹ V.P. Franklin, 'Documenting the Contributions of Children and Teenagers to the Civil Rights Movement,' *The Journal of African American History*, Vol. 100, No. 4, 2015, 668.

⁶² L. Blanchfield, 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child', *Congressional Research Service*, 2015, 1.

⁶³ S.J. Lee, 'A Child's Voice vs. a Parent's Control: Resolving a Tension Between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and US Law,' *Columbia Law Review*, Vol. 117, No. 3, April 2017, 687.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 700.

⁶⁵ *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923), 262 US 390.

⁶⁶ S.J. Lee, 'A Child's Voice vs. a Parent's Control: Resolving a Tension Between the Convention on the Rights of the Child and US Law,' 711-717.

In reviewing the history, critiques, and evidence regarding the United States' lack of CRC ratification and youth strategy, it becomes apparent that the US is an outlier in the global community regarding the government's relationship with youth. US culture is one that forces a broader conversation about reconciling the rights of parents and youth, and the role of the government and institutions in implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Notably, localities and states within the US have established bodies that give students some or all of the concepts in the Lundy model: space, voice, audience, and influence, thus proving that youth representation is not incompatible with American systems. Some of the states and municipal governments that have implemented youth councils with the ability to impact policy include the states of Indiana,⁶⁷ Iowa,⁶⁸ Louisiana,⁶⁹ Massachusetts,⁷⁰ Minnesota,⁷¹ New Hampshire,⁷² and Washington;⁷³ and municipalities like Albuquerque, New Mexico.⁷⁴

The United States has staked its heritage as a nation founded on the ideals of liberty and freedom. Despite acting as an international conflict mediator and a global defender of human rights, the United States has yet to ratify a human rights treaty with some of the highest adoption numbers of treaties in global history. Numerous attempts and actions by presidential administrations in the United States have pushed the CRC into the national public policy conversation, all attempts falling short of the 'advice and consent' of the Senate for ratification. An act of the US Congress or an executive order could establish a body within the existing institutions of the federal government and provide the opportunity for youth voices to impact public policy, policy debates,

⁶⁷ Indiana Bar Foundation, *Indiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council* [website], <https://www.inbarfoundation.org/indiana-legislative-youth-advisory-council/>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁶⁸ Iowa Department of Human Rights, *SIYAC* [website], <https://humanrights.iowa.gov/cjpp/siyac>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁶⁹ Louisiana Commission on Civic Education, *Legislative Youth Advisory Council* [website], https://house.louisiana.gov/civiced/default_LYAC, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁷⁰ Governor of Massachusetts, *Governor's Statewide Youth Council* [website], <https://appointments.state.ma.us/BoardDetail.aspx?brdid=100425>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁷¹ Minnesota Alliance with Youth, *Minnesota Youth Council* [website], <https://mnyouth.net/myc/>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁷² Office of the Governor of New Hampshire, *Governor's Youth Advisory Council* [website], <https://www.governor.nh.gov/youth>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁷³ Legislative Youth Advisory Council, *Washington's Official Youth Voice* [website], <https://www.walyac.org/>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

⁷⁴ City of Albuquerque, *Mayor's Youth Advisory Council* [website], <https://www.cabq.gov/mayor/mayors-youth-advisory-council>, (accessed 1 June 2023).

policy implementation, and policy review effectively and meaningfully. Until such actions are carried out, the international community will continue to recognize the United States as an outlier among UN member states, as American youth continue to lack the rights and liberties of the CRC and the representation propounded by Article 12.

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