



The Next Generation

Democracy! The Podcast

Season 1: Episode 4

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Adrienne Ross 0:06

Hi, and welcome to *Democracy! The Podcast* that shines the light on some of the darkest challenges facing the fight for democracy around the globe.

Joe Biden 0:16

Democracy will and must prevail.

Adrienne Ross 0:20

This podcast is brought to you by the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening direct from Washington DC, with support from our friends at the United States Agency for International Development through the Global Elections and Political Transitions Award. I'm your host, Adrienne Ross. Do you know that more than half of the population on earth is under the age of 30? Millennials worldwide are the largest living generation in the workforce. And today, 1.8 billion young people make up the largest youth count in history. So, if we're going to be talking about real democratic representation, we have to think about Generation Y, and Z and the whole ABCs. They've already got a head start in Libya, where the country's most trusted organization, the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, are doing their part to combat hate speech, fake news, and disinformation. We'll get the full report from Tripoli. And then we go back to school in Ukraine. Check out a college class that's changing lives. Amy Radlinski has all the details on the next generation.

Amy Radlinski

Young Leaders worldwide are enjoying a real moment. In 2017, In New Zealand, Jacinda Arden became the world's youngest head of government at age 37. The Finnish Prime Minister Simon Marvin is currently the youngest sitting Prime Minister. In El Salvador, President Capelli is often called Latin America's presidential millennial. He won his race at 38 in 2019. Also, Ukraine's Prime Minister Olekiy Honcharuk had reportedly just three months of government experience when he was appointed in 2019 at age 35. His boss, President Zelensky, is 43. Of the 1.8 billion young people in the world today, 90% of them live in developing countries. Their homes are often in countries where a rise in violent extremism, unemployment, climate change, and many other issues call for urgent investment. In Libya, for example, the size of the youth population is very large at 67%.

Despite this unprecedented size, the Libyan Civil War and the risk of the pandemic has closed hundreds of much needed schools. Now, add the fog of disinformation that makes it tough for anyone to know what to believe.

Adrienne Ross

So where do we begin? Anis Elwallani is the Senior Program Manager in Libya for the National Democratic Institute. He is a graduate of Tripoli schools and joins us now to talk about the use of his homeland and an innovative program aimed at the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides of Libya. First of all, what was it like for you growing up in Libya?

Anis Elwallani

It was funny, it was adventure a little bit. So, growing up in like a middle class family, we face a lot of issues and problems during the Gaddafi regime. My parents tried to invest in me and my brothers and sisters to keep studying to build ourselves to build our capacity to not wait for anything we provide for you. It was difficult a little bit. We didn't have that much entertainment. As you know, the dictatorship in Libya was very difficult. So, we have certain amount of entertainment activity that you could do easily and freely. So, Scouts was my way to have fun.

Adrienne Ross

I was the Girl Scout so I certainly appreciate that it really changes your life. Once a scout always a scout.

Anis Elwallani

Exactly.

Adrienne Ross

Can you briefly tell us a little bit more about the disinformation problem in Libya and the region and why it is important to raise awareness among the youth?

Anis Elwallani

So basically, in the region, for the last 10 years was a big problem. Many people are now starting to use social media, the internet was the easy way to escape from reality. People start using social media and internet to spread rumors, creating more attention for people who are looking for attention. They just are trying to create any problem that could cause problems to other people.

So, they use social media as a platform for this kind of poison. Recently, with the Arab Spring, the old Revolution, and the Civil War happening in the region, people started using this platform to hate each other, to create more conflict, to build the heat more than build peace. So that was one of the biggest reasons for the conflict and problems happening in the whole region, because of the disinformation and the fake news that was pointing this situation, creating more problems, creating more conflict, not supporting the people to get healed from what's happened during the wars, but they are more making difficult, more complicated, making people more involved in conflict, they have no reason to be there, people lost their lives, lost their jobs, people have been hurt a lot by this kind of disinformation, people have been accused to be this and that. And they face a lot of problems because of this. And the region is different to Europe or US or other countries, so the reputations are very important. The main idea of the program is trying to make people understand more how they can find their information, the right information, which source how can you fact check, how to understand this is not reliable source. So, we try to raise awareness among the younger generation to try to do the fact checking to understand not everything you see on social media or the internet that you can share, and you believe you need to do fact checking, to understand the source you use for your information. Not everything you read is true. So, you need to do a little bit of work to understand the real information from the fake information. Because this is could cause a problem for many people. And some people like rely on this evening. There's like schooling like when they study any information, they find they could use without doing fact checking like this information is true or not.

Adrienne Ross

So, what made you think about the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides?

Anis Elwallani

In Libya, it's the most like trusted organization as the largest, the oldest organization, the country starting during the kingdom days. So, it's covering all of Libya soil, we have that huge number of Boys and Girl Scouts in Libya, they are very active, they try to help their community they are trusted from the community. So, when we start talking to the leadership of Boy Scouts, we explained about the idea how this project was going to do campaigns around how much the scouts are trusted from the community. So they already start planning on something about this, they started this campaign after working with us on this project called the bonfire on an Arabic. So let's say good, don't say like bad dates. If you want to say something, just say something that you didn't say. So, we started with the nine cities in Libya, we started delivering training, but as you know, with the COVID and the pandemic and the curfew sometimes like that, that was difficult. So, we know we do more activity on social media. We started doing some videos from Boy Scouts and Girl Guides in different cities to try to raise awareness about the how very bad is to share bad news, how much is heard when you say fake information and people will believe it and this will affect my future as a kid. So, we try to work with the scout because they are the most trusted organization the country. So, they try to start the campaign on ground with the crushing of that COVID procedure. So now they are working and to do some videos, they tried to do some more radio station shows. They tried to do

a flash mob in certain areas, they will try to do too in school, schools are coming back soon. So, they will try in each age, they will try to share this knowledge with other children. And they will try to share it with their parents, with their family, they will try to record videos, we planning to do some metal like graffiti on the wall we will do like art gallery, drawings about all that fake news and disinformation. Soon, we're going to launch two games in Sharla about integrity and fake news. So, the young generation, this time, it's different than young generation like 10 years ago, so the kids this time they are aware a lot of new technology. They're using internet more than the older generation. So, when you when you explain about them how to take your information with source, so you'll be surprised like they know Wikipedia, you know how to code build you know, like some like news channel website, not the TV channel, but the website. So, they have a lot of info about like how to get that information. They know like the celebrity they have the blue sign so there's an official account. So, we trust this account, oh, this is a musician and etc. So, it's It wasn't difficult. Actually, it was difficult with maybe the older people, when we deliver trainings for some leaders and all the ages, they don't have the same knowledge, they don't have the same background than the young generation.

Adrienne Ross

You actually train the scout leaders, and they train their scouts?

Anis Elwallani

We started with the leaders from both genders from nine cities, so from south and west and center. So, we'll have leaders from the north and east, south will have to have more diversity to have more representation. Then I started delivering training for the younger generation myself, I trained around 55 between boys and girls, and young age, like starting from six years old and 14 and 15. And some like teenagers as well. So, it was a great experience. Children, they have much knowledge, they are motivated to learn new things they try to practice they try to share this knowledge.

Adrienne Ross

It sounds like fun, too.

Anis Elwallani

Yeah, exactly. Because we use games. So even the activity that we conduct, it's through games, not just like, okay, the fake news is blah, blah, blah, you're not going to school, or traditional school. So, we tried to make it more fun.

Adrienne Ross

It sounds like it will stay with them for their life to for their lifetime.

Anis Elwallani

It's the start. Sending like a message to the through the Facebook page, , "Hey, we know this is not official source. So, we don't read it anymore. Like, we don't watch this channel, because we don't know if it's like stealing this cartoon or not." So, children they get they reflected on their own life, what they see. And when they share it with their parents, they try to see what their parents they do, right and what they do and wrong. Because not everything we saw on TV or radio, or like website or social media is real or official. So, this is an will be good back on the children and their parents as well.

Adrienne Ross

What advice do you give other organizations looking to engage with youth politically?

Anis Elwallani

In Libya, as you know, we still have like new life of politics. We didn't have any political life before 10 years ago, so many people are now targeting the young, or the youth in general, because the majority of Libya is huge. It's more than 66% of the population are young generation, they are so huge. So, my advice that to keep focusing more about building your capacity, finding the best career to be if you want to be involved, like in politics, learn more, do not be the fuel of war, because many people using the younger generation as a fuel for conflict, but we cannot find many of them like exists in parliament, municipality, or like government or cabinet and etc. So, it's really sad to see like, the most highest like treasure the nation have, and they just found it on the ground because the aiming to have more like influence.

Adrienne Ross

It's excellent advice, and we certainly don't want children anywhere to be fuel for a war. So excellently said, Anis thank you so much for joining us today.

Anis Elwallani

Thank you.

Adrienne Ross

Now we had about 3,000 miles northwest from Libya to Ukraine. Gio Kobakhidze is the Deputy Country Director for the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in Ukraine, and the technical lead on civic education. After a USAID engaged civic poll showed that the number of people turning out to support democracy in Ukraine was the lowest among younger citizens, Gio and his team created and introduced an interactive semester long civics class with funding from USAID and launched it at accredited universities throughout the country. Gio is here now to tell us why he thinks youth engagement might have been so poor for so long.

Gio Kobakhidze

Thank you for having me, Adrienne. It is actually an auspicious day to have this conversation because it is now Ukraine's 30th anniversary of its independence from the Soviet Union. And over this period, young people have played a critical role in championing democratic progress for their nation. It was just over seven years ago, that Ukraine experienced its Revolution of Dignity. At that time, 1,000s of brave Ukrainians took to the streets to demand the right to choose their own future and a better tomorrow. Many, including young people sacrificed their own lives in pursuit of this goal with this recent history in mind and on the face of it, the research finding your referenced, which points to a lower level of engagement of youth does indeed stand out. And in response to your question, I would posit that, notwithstanding progress in key areas in Ukraine, such as electoral reform for many Ukrainians and especially youth, the pace of post revolution reform over the seven years has not necessarily met their expectations. Disenchantment with what many saw as a muzzled battle against corruption, and stalled judicial efforts among other areas continue to pervade society to this day. On top of this, young people did not have educational opportunities to learn about their rights and responsibilities as democratic citizens and thus many young people I spoke with, while hopeful, felt frustrated and powerless, many expressed a strong desire to contribute to ongoing reforms and more broadly, to their societies but were not always sure where to start.

Adrienne Ross

So, you thought a university level course might help? What does the curriculum cover?

Gio Kobakhidze

Indeed, yeah, we believe strongly that education, in particular civic education, is a linchpin in building inclusive, resilient, and sustainable democracies that deliver for all when done right. Civic Education empowers individuals, to meaningfully engage in their country's democracy, because without effective civic education, the opportunity for disinformation, corruption, and electoral fraud increases. The course itself is tailored for Ukraine by representatives of Ukrainian civil society and academia. And it's based on IFES' global university level civic education methodology, named SEED, which stands for strengthening engagement through education for democracy. The coursework introduces students to fundamental concepts of democratic citizenship, systems of

governance, civic participation, and human rights. It does so through a highly interactive, student-centered learning environment, that prioritizes active learning and critical thinking through the course. Each semester, students develop their own civic action projects, wherein they identify problems within their communities that they try and improve. Then they bring these plans to life and actually go beyond the classroom and go on to make positive impacts in their own communities. These have included projects that have addressed gender-based violence, minority rights, corruption, voter education, and global warming, to name just a few. The interactive teaching methodology and action projects that I mentioned, are designed to not only teach students about democracy, but to also help students experience democracy in and beyond their own classrooms.

Adrienne Ross

That's quite a class. What kind of students are you finding enroll in this class? What are their ambitions?

Gio Kobakhidze

It's a good question and thanks to the support of the United States Agency for International Development, USAID, Global Affairs Canada, and UKAID from the UK government, the course is now available throughout the country to over 39 universities and growing. So now 1,000s of students in all types of universities, from the Medical University, to the law University, from hotkey than the east to Kiev the West, to Odessa in the south. Students all over Ukraine now get the experience of this type of modern, interactive civic education course. So, it really has the broad spectrum of passionate, motivated, talented Ukrainian youth who are taking this class. And many have already gone on to do amazing things. Now, I also want to point out that through this entire experience, we've had the benefit of meeting and partnering with incredible university level civic educators throughout Ukraine and professors who are incredibly passionate, and are really the foundation of strengthening Ukrainian democracy and really strengthening Ukraine's future and we see it in their work. We see it in their classrooms every day.

Adrienne Ross

Well, we certainly know that's important. But why is it important to have these courses for university students?

Gio Kobakhidze

Ideally, democratic civic education should start as early as possible and continue throughout the course of our academic journeys. Unfortunately, it is also often overlooked by nations. And because of this, its absence becomes the Achilles heel for developing and mature democracies worldwide. In Ukraine, the percentage of youth enrolled in university is very high comparatively, and it also includes an age range that is, for the first time having the possibility to vote in elections,

and to engage in civic life more deeply. We were also very fortunate to receive strong support from Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Sciences, as well as our university partners. On this question, it's also important to note that while Ukraine and other regions in the area aspired toward greater European integration, its formal structures of education are too often hampered by Soviet legacy of strict punitive relations of power between students and teachers, a structure that often prioritized memorization and passive learning over student centered interactive teaching that stimulates soft and hard skills like critical thinking and digital literacy, for example.

Adrienne Ross

And I'm sure we have plenty of teachers listening who will agree with that. What can you tell us about what your alumni of this program have gone on to do? Do you track them? Do you know where they are?

Gio Kobakhidze

Yeah, we've had the fortune of meeting with many students with many teachers, we, of course, evaluate coursework itself and the teaching methodology that we use. And through a range of the tools we have, we have been able to demonstrate that students analytically gained knowledge and skills and attitudes that they themselves identify as being essential for them to, for example, monitor and hold their governments were accountable, to protect their own rights, to protect the rights of others, and to be a successful citizen and an informed citizen in the digital age. And now, with 1,000s of students across the country, over 39 universities. And for us, this is something that really fuels us, it gives us energy, when we get to experience the teachers when we get to experience the students. And in that context, and in the framework of what we see globally, of democracy under attack of the threats that are very much real, and in some sense, increasing over the years to democracy, this truly gives all of us at IFES a sense of hope, as we see today's and tomorrow's leaders really taking on the mantle, understanding that, yes, democracy is messy, it's difficult, but that it is really the responsibility of each generation, to defend it, to uphold it, and to make sure it survives for our children, for our grandchildren, and so on.

Adrienne Ross

Do you know if any of your students have run for office?

Gio Kobakhidze

Yes, we have had some that have gone into politics, we have some that have gone into election administration. We have others that went into other spheres, the human rights defenders. So, there are many examples of students taking what they learned in the course and applying it to their everyday lives. And what we have seen over the last multiple decades as IFES is that is that effective civic education is essential. It's not an option. It's essential for resilient for robust

democracies. And indeed, it has never been arguably as important as it is today, with all of the threats that we see, to democracy, in today's reality, with the onset of the digital age. So, my message, my call out, my shout out is for all of us, irrespective of where we live, irrespective of how many years perhaps we have had free and fair elections, we must all take a very deep look into our own educational structures. And critically consider are we doing enough? Can we do more? And if not, where do our youth, where do our students, where do they learn about democracy? How do they understand their own role vis-a-vie society? And with all of the various distractions we all have nowadays? And if the answer is we can do more, I think we should all roll up our sleeves and see what we can do to realize this and to secure our democracies and even go beyond securing it to make them more resilient.

Adrienne Ross

Gio, thank you for these important words on education. We really appreciate you joining us today.

Gio Kobakhidze

Thank you very much, Adrienne. It was my pleasure to join you.

Adrienne Ross

We turn now to a recent college grad to talk more about getting people into politics at an earlier age. Malik Salvić is the President of the European Democracy Youth Network, which is supported by CEPPS partners. Malik graduated this year from the College of Computer Science and Business Communications Empirica in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and hosts one of the country's most popular podcast where he talks to inspiring young leaders. Malik joins me now and shares some tough talk on the serious challenges facing his friends and explains what drives him to be so politically engaged.

Malik Salvić

We are, I would say, still going through the transition process of like the former communist countries and even the most of the countries here have their democratic systems for over 30 years. You still have the Politicians from the former systems of being involved within the government, and it's not working really well, because they are used to something else. If you're a young person from mostly Eastern Europe, from the Balkans, and you're able to see this, your whole life, and your whole life is just a series of bad events here. If that happens, every day something at the age of 16/15/17, just snaps within your link head, I would say and it gets you to be involved. And I would see the series of bad events that is happening within our countries on a daily basis, it just gets you going to be involved with everything here.

Adrienne Ross

Is that what happened to you?

Malik Salvić

Yes, yes. Unfortunately, I was born within a family, my father was killed in a war five months before I was born. He was fighting for democracy of this country, our country was attacked. And he was fighting for a better future for me, my mom, and my family members. Seeing that almost, I don't know, 10-15 years and 20 years after he died, unfortunately, not a lot of things have changed. And a lot of people who were bad people during that period are still involved with the government and it, it's just like, somewhere in your head. It's unfair. And like it gives you, I would say, fuel to be involved with everything here. And just to see that someone who fought for the freedom of this country hasn't done it for nothing I would say the fight for democracy never stopped. It just changes the way we fight with it. But it will never stop, you will always have I would say bad people who want to be involved with this in in a different way. But you have to keep on fighting.

Adrienne Ross

Do you feel like you're carrying your dad's legacy forward?

Malik Salvić

I don't know. I'm not sure like at this point that I have to give a life or my country because we're not in war or anything. But I feel that I have to give myself with all of my resources, and everything that I do. And that is why I try to be involved in as many organizations as possible here and try to, especially work with young people, it's important to be on the side which will try to empower as much as possible of younger generations in order to like keep fighting because younger generations are the future of this country and if we keep losing them, all of this will like break apart.

Adrienne Ross

Do you think that that hopelessness is the number one complaint you hear from peers in your country?

Malik Salvić

The number one problem of young people here, it's about unemployment, it's about I would say not seeing a better future.

Adrienne Ross

Where do you tell your peers to start?

Malik Salvić

I think getting started is definitely the hardest part of this job. The hardest part of any civil activities here. Because if you get started with doing something here, a lot of people who are, as I mentioned, sick of this country will tell you Yeah, like you don't have to do this. Everybody hates you here, you're not going to change anything. And if you're on your first day of your civil activities, you will have at least 20 to 30 people telling you that is a bad idea. That is a number one issue with starting here. Because that is what gets all of those it's a huge number of people want to be a part of it just to step back. And also, we are used to it, but with the older generations, if you start doing something you should see a change overnight. That mostly never happens, especially if it's above the government or something like sometimes you like need a whole mandate just to like, clean the mess up. But I wanted to mention something else, we work with young people we try to teach them both personal responsibilities even though this is this a country like there's millions of people involved in the public. If you start working on yourself, I think Jordan Peterson said that, like if you make your bed in the morning, you'll definitely be able to change the world at some point. Because if you start dealing with yourself with the smallest steps in your life, and if all of us did this, if all of us just cleaned our backyards every morning, this will be a better country. And like we start with teaching that just start with the smallest steps from the point when you wake up. That way you will have like a momentum of good examples happening from like day one. And everything else after that will just be a big accomplishment.

Adrienne Ross

Well, I think that's really aspirational. But if we were to break it down a little bit, what would you tell people to do? First, everyone doesn't have to run for office, right?

Malik Salvić

Not every one of us could be the president. Especially, if you asked, like, you have over 200 million people, not everybody could be the president. But we keep forgetting, forgetting that the most important part of political organizations or of any organizations, or your local organization, start working, within your street, but in your house will within your building, with the small problems that you have around yourself, and maybe you will fall in love with that part of politics, that part of civil engagement, and that is the way to keep on going. A lot of us when we start working, we get discouraged. If we are not like on the parliament list on the floor, like after two years, like, that's not going to happen, because you have a lot of people who have been doing amazing job for like 10 to 15 years and they set their names up and in order to go there, you have to start like with the smallest steps within your local organization.

Adrienne Ross

I think that's excellent advice. Malik, thank you so much for joining us. This has been fantastic.

Malik Salvić

Thank you so much for inviting me. It was awesome.

Adrienne Ross

Coming up on the next episode of *Democracy! The Podcast*, we head to Tunisia, where some women have been breaking the government's glass ceiling since 1950s. But for others getting involved in the political process has been a bit more of a challenge. Hear the surprising transformation some women experienced when they finally had a chance to vote will get their full story. That's ahead on our next episode of *Democracy! The Podcast*.

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