

UTPOST

MAGAZINE

*The Hope of
Tomorrow*

UMEÅ ASSOCIATION OF
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS



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Editor's Note

Dear Reader,

We face a future that is in many ways uncertain. What will happen to our planet and society as we know it? What we know is that it is the youth of today that will build and govern our future. Youth that face both challenges and opportunities going forwards, which is what I want to explore in this edition of UTPOST. My formative years have been defined by young people standing up for what they believe in, from singular activists such as Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg, to entire movements such as "March for our lives". I want to share the inspiration they have given me with all of you, and in the process bring to light the reality of what young people face as they try to make a difference in the world. It is my hope that something in this edition of UTPOST will inspire you, and ignite your own drive to change the world.

Best wishes,

Magdalena Hautala
Substitute Editor

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ONLINE OR IN THE STREETS STUDENT PROTESTS IN THAILAND



EMMA LARSSON

Photo by Lauren DeCicca

The world has been witnessing a surge of protests and movements online, which has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. The Three-finger salute, which was originally used in the Hunger Games movies, has been adopted as a symbol of resistance in various countries and has been seen on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

The 2020 protests in Thailand have been shaped by the norms of the age of technology, demanding human rights and democracy through shared posts as well as on demonstration posters.

Thailand has a long and tumultuous history of coup d'états, demonstrations, and military regimes. The cycle usually involves a military coup overthrowing an elected government, followed by mass protests and an eventual return to democratic elections. Unfortunately, this cycle has repeated itself thirteen times in the last ninety years, with elected governments overthrown by military coups.

One of these return to democracy was the '72 Revolution, a non-violent, student-led movement that managed to galvanise the entire nation against an oppressive military dictatorship. This movement can be traced to the expansion of universities in Thailand, with the goal of creating a more educated and prosperous society. As the universities expanded in both size and number, so did the ideas and thoughts that sprouted from them. Students began gathering in discussion groups, which eventually became the catalyst for the powerful student movement that challenged the dictatorship.

In contrast, the 2020 student movement in Thailand had a more contradicting nature, with high media attention but low actual attendance, resulting in a weak and disorganised organisation. The movement began on campuses and had themed demonstrations, but Covid-19 pushed the movement online instead of onto the streets. The role of technology and digitization cannot be ignored, and it has forever changed the way we work and understand the world. However, the 2020 movement's failure can act as an example showcasing that online momentum does not necessarily lead to real-world participation and results. In the field of non-violence studies, mass mobilisation is considered to be the determining factor for non-violent movements' negotiate

as it creates pressure on the state to meet demands or negotiate.

But today is a different day, and many things have changed since the 70's. The recent passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej and the succession of his son, King Vajiralongkorn, has led to significant changes in Thailand's political landscape. King Bhumibol was beloved and mysticised by the Thai people, while his son has a more scandalous reputation, including enforcing the use of lèse-majesté laws and proclaiming ownership of royal assets. This has angered many young Thais, and the older generation does not have the same trust or nostalgia for the new king. The newly elected government is characterised by a more liberal and future oriented stance which has hopefully opened up new possibilities for the future of Thailand. Maybe the cycle of democracy being overthrown can finally end?

In conclusion, while online protests and movements can gain significant media attention, their success in bringing about real-world change depends on the mass mobilisation and participation of people. It is essential to remember that the impact of technology and digitization in shaping the world is not a one-sided affair, and it is up to us to decide how we use it.

The foundings of March for our lives and its basis in American legislation

Rebecca Slättås

Photography Alex Radelich, Isabella Fischer & Heather Mount

On February 14th, 2018, seventeen people were killed in Parkland, Florida. This turned out to be the breaking point for high school students all over the USA, one that spread throughout the country and eventually, the world.

Twenty-eight of the surviving students wanted to take action, and formed the organisation March for Our Lives, dedicated to fighting gun violence. The movement quickly spread, as millions of American students demanded change against gun violence in history.



The students were, in their own words - inspired by the Freedom Riders from the early 1960s, protesting against segregated bus terminals between black and white American citizens. The group of civil rights activists travelled around the American southern states. March for Our Lives followed their path and travelled all around the United States prior to the midterm election of 2018, with the aim of inspiring youth to make their voices heard, and of course, vote against gun violence. And the result? Over 50 000 newly registered voters, and an increase of youth voters turn-out in forty-seven percent, which is the largest youth participation in an election in the US ever. It also resulted in forty-six candidates' losses due to them being supported by the NRA - National Rifle Association

What are the aims of March for our lives? Well, their overall purpose is to influence the political power, as a grassroot movement, establishing themselves at a local as well as a state level. And, of course, the elimination of gun violence in America. In their policy agenda it is widely summarised what both the reasons and consequences of the current legislation are.

Gun violence is a heavily debated topic in the US, as there is great polarisation between the political sides, and the supporters of these.

The second amendment is largely used as an argument by the pro-gun supporters, as they claim their right to protect themselves from strangers. Laws controlling gun ownership also infringes the right of self-defence, to many supporters of the current legislation. Is it the weapon that is the most dangerous, or the person holding it? The division between the two parties originates from ideological fragmentation, as republicans generally have more of a contradicting outlook on state intervention whereas democrats in general have a more relaxed approach.

The second amendment of the American constitution states the right for all individuals to own weapons, and arm themselves, to ensure each and all's right to the necessity of a free state. According to a study done by the Small Arms Survey, the United States is the country with the highest ratio of firearms per civilian in the world, with a total of 120 guns per 100 persons. This is more than double of the amount in the second highest country, Yemen, which has recently been affected by war. Although, if you look at the total amount of firearms owned by civilians, you will find that the US has more than five times as high ownership of guns as the next placed country, which is India.

So, what will the solution be? How do you find a way to unite the opposing sides of the discussion?

The political structure in the United States is built upon the self dependence of all federal states, whereas the legislative power has been delegated from the Congress. The delegated tasks include interstate relations such as infrastructure, agriculture, state police or financial institutions whereas the congress holds the power on the federal level. Since gun legislation is regulated in the constitution, this means that it is the congress which holds the power, which makes the issue of gun violence complicated because of the senators' interpretation of the regulation. Ideologically this topic is highly divided between partisans of the different parties, making it difficult to pass regulations concerning the field.



MFOL became one of the biggest protests in the US ever, the turnout was estimated to approximately 1,2 to 2 million people participating. This shows the huge eagerness of American youth. Protests were held all over the world. Voting participation in young adults increased significantly in the US presidential election of 2020. They demanded change, a response from the holders of power.

Since the March for Our Lives movement, at least 67 gun safety gun laws have been implemented in the United States. Gun violence was one of the most crucial matters in the mid term election in 2018, which in combination with the higher voter turnout resulted in a change of power in the house of representatives, with a majority for the Democrats.

Finally, it has been made clear that American school students want change. Is gun legislation too imprinted in the countrys' culture? Or is it just a question of obstinance? It is up to the future generations, only time will tell.

MAKE
AMERICA
**THINK
AGAIN**



Photography Jose M.

Political activism, Social Media, and Challenges Around the World

Elin Parviainen

“Social media is not just a tool for political activists, it has become the lifeblood of modern protest movements.” - Clay Shirky

With the emergence of Facebook in 2004, Twitter in 2006 and Instagram in 2010, political activists have gained abilities never imagined before. Social media enables activists worldwide to connect at an unprecedented speed, significantly amplifying the impact of their activism. It is not only about rallying for a common cause through protests but also about spreading awareness. Social media allows information to reach a larger audience, even those not directly impacted by the focus of the activism itself.

However, despite being an invaluable tool, social media also poses threats to activists and society at large. It is not uncommon for major social media platforms to be used for spreading disinformation, fake news and propaganda, which can

undermine the credibility of political movements and institutions. This is just one of the challenges activists face on a daily basis. This article will delve into the challenges faced by modern-day political activism from different contexts.

To quote rhetorics used by Republicans and alt-right movements in the US, there is a belief that the online population of political activists consist mainly of *“Libtards, snowflakes and socialists”*. While the wording may be contentious, there is some support for this claim. A study by the University of Oxford’s Computational Propaganda Project found that progressive groups were more likely to use social media to promote political content during the 2016 U.S election campaign. Research also suggests that young people are more likely to be politically active on social media platforms than older generations. According to a study by the Pew Research Center, 44% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 29 reported using

social media to get involved with political and social issues, compared to 31% of those between 30 and 49, 21% of those between 50 and 64, and only 10% of those aged 65 and older. This trend is not limited to the United States. A global survey conducted by Amnesty International found that young people between the ages of 18 and 24 were the most likely to engage in online activism, with 65% reporting that they had taken action on a social or political issue through social media.

There is a common theme regarding the challenges that activists around the world face. According to the annual report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur published in March 2021, political activists face an increasing number of threats and attacks, both online and offline. The report found that women in particular face additional risks, including sexual violence and gender-based attacks. The perpetrators range from state to non-state actors and can include criminal organisations, state-sponsored actors, automated bots, groups of other political and ideological agendas. The fear of harassment and persecution can deter individuals from engaging in political activism, leading to a chilling effect on free speech and expression. However, the challenges and threats for political activists around the world are not entirely the same.

Western political activists face numerous challenges in their pursuit of social and political change. To shed light on the difficulties modern-day activists encounter, various countries will be presented as specific examples.

In the United States, the political climate can be highly polarised, posing a significant challenge for young activists who aim to bridge divides and build consensus. Navigating ideological differences and fostering productive dialogue can be particularly difficult, especially on contentious issues. Engaging in political activism can also expose individuals to surveillance, scrutiny, and even arrests by law enforcement agencies. Such circumstances create a climate of fear and intimidation, deterring some young activists from participating or speaking out on certain issues. These obstacles hinder their ability to effectively engage in the democratic process.

Similarly, in the UK, there is a sense of political apathy among the younger generation, leading to increasingly lower voter turnout. Many young people feel disenchanted with politics, exhibiting apathy towards voting or participating in political processes. Since the 1997 parliamentary election, the UK has not witnessed a voter turnout above 70%, with a dramatic drop to 59.4% in 2001,

as reported by International IDEA. This issue is not unique to the UK alone but is a worrying trend observed in several nations, including the US, Sweden, and Australia. Despite Sweden and Australia historically having higher turnout above 80%, there has been a decrease in recent elections. Overcoming voter apathy and encouraging political engagement among young people remains a persistent challenge for activists.

Many young individuals may feel disillusioned or disconnected from traditional political processes and institutions, making it challenging to mobilise support for their causes. The rise of social media and digital platforms has saturated the media landscape, making it difficult for young activists to stand out and capture the attention of their target audience. They struggle to effectively convey their message amidst various distractions. Political polarisation adds to the challenge, as people hold deeply entrenched and opposing views. Young activists may encounter difficulties in bridging these divides, fostering dialogue, and finding common ground, hindering their efforts to build broad-based movements for change.

Beyond political apathy and polarisation, another trend observed in countries like the US, UK, Sweden, and others is

due to financial constraints, politically diverse and polarised societies, and the difficulty of achieving meaningful representation within existing political structures. These structures often perpetuate ageism, limiting young activists' access to decision-making positions and leading to scepticism from older generations. Additionally, the negative exposure they risk facing on social media can manifest into physical dangers.

Beyond political apathy and polarisation, another trend observed in countries like the US, UK, Sweden, and others is the struggle faced by young activists due to financial constraints, politically diverse and polarised societies, and the difficulty of achieving meaningful representation within existing political structures. These structures often perpetuate ageism, limiting young activists' access to decision-making positions and leading to scepticism from older generations. Additionally, the negative exposure they risk facing on social media can manifest into physical dangers.

In contrast to their American and British counterparts, young political activists in Japan, India, South Korea, Russia, and China, face unique challenges specific to their political and social contexts.

Harassment, intimidation, and violence are pervasive, leading to the targeting and arrest of activists and dissidents based on their online activities and presence on social media platforms. A notable example is the arrest of Joshua Wong, a pro-democracy activist from Hong Kong in 2020.

While social media platforms help activist groups reach larger audiences, regional censorship poses a significant obstacle in certain parts of the world. Restrictions are imposed on various platforms to control the flow of information and maintain political control. For instance, China and North Korea have banned Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. China operates a sophisticated internet censorship system known as the „Great Firewall,“ which blocks access to many foreign websites and social media platforms. Instead, citizens are encouraged to use domestic platforms like WeChat and Weibo, which are heavily censored and monitored. It is not surprising that North Korea, one of the most repressive regimes globally, enforces a total ban. In countries such as Iran, Russia, and Turkey, Instagram is accessible, but Facebook and Twitter are banned. However, even on these platforms, governments exert external pressure to monitor and censor content. A commonality among these countries, exemplified by Russia, is the repression

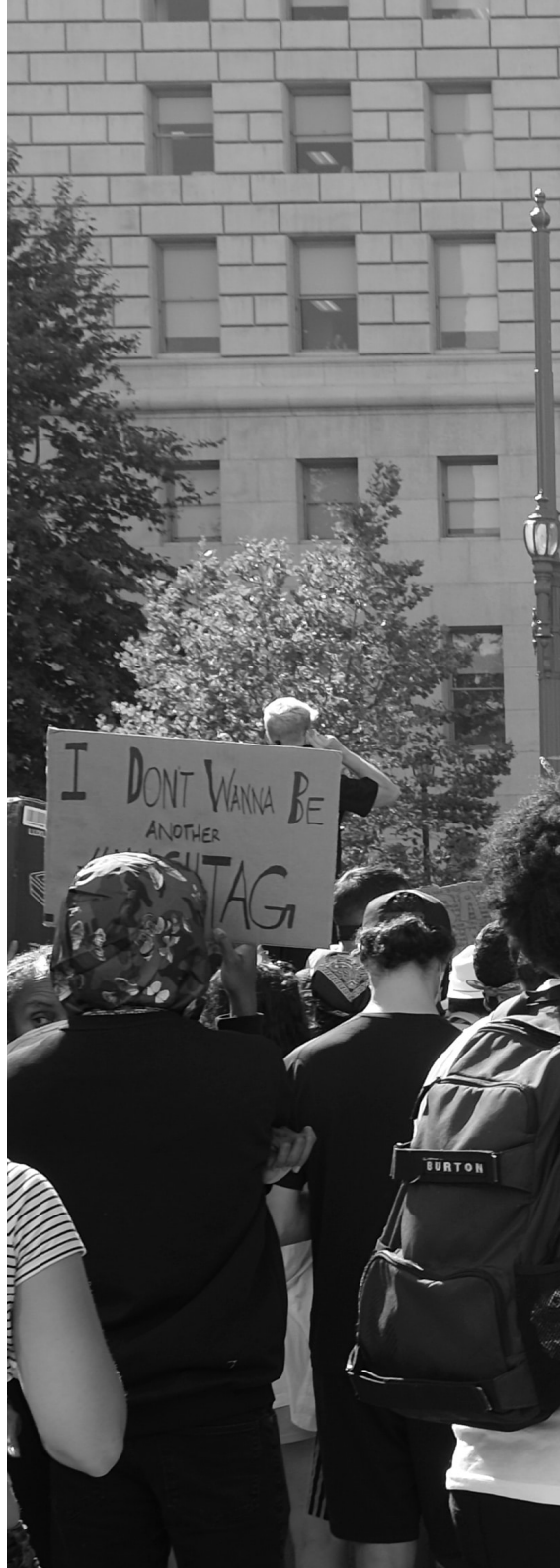
and restrictions faced by political activists. Advocates for political reforms or government challengers often encounter harassment, surveillance, and legal consequences, including arrests and imprisonment.

In countries like South Korea and Japan, families may discourage youth from engaging in political activism due to fear of retribution from authorities or social disapproval. This can result in social isolation and exclusion from family and community events, posing a significant threat in countries that prioritise social unity. Political activism is often perceived as a threat to social order and stability, subjecting young activists to scrutiny and suspicion from law enforcement agencies, political authorities, and other members of society. Harassment, intimidation, or arrest may follow, particularly for activists advocating for marginalised groups or controversial issues. Individuals who deviate from accepted behaviour norms may struggle to reintegrate with society and local communities in the future.

Another issue, exemplified by India and South Korea, is that politics often revolves around established political connections and patronage networks. Young activists without political connections or family ties may find it challenging to access positions of influence or receive support

from established political parties. Additionally, young female activists, in particular, may encounter additional barriers to their participation in politics due to patriarchal cultural norms and gender-based discrimination. Speaking out may subject them to verbal abuse, threats of violence, and further restrictions on their political engagement.

In summary, while there are similarities in the challenges faced by political activists, there are also significant differences based on specific cultural contexts. The main issue for Western countries stems mainly from political polarisation and apathy. While political activists from countries outside of this perimeter such as China, South Korea, India etc instead struggle with censorship, social barriers and traditionally patriarchal societies. Social media offers both opportunities and challenges for political activists. However, it is important to recognise that social media is merely a tool that relies on factors such as those mentioned above. These obstacles all hinder activists' ability to bring about meaningful change and combating them is crucial to create a more inclusive and equitable society.



I UNDERSTAND
THAT I WILL
never understand
HOWEVER I STAND

NO JUSTICE
NO PEACE
TER

I CAN BREATHE



How the Youth is Transforming Democracy Through the LGBTQ+ Movement

David Gren

Photography Nikolas Gannon



Democracy has always thrived on the active participation of its citizens. Throughout history, the youth have played a pivotal role in driving social change. In contemporary times, one of the most significant movements propelled by the youth is the LGBTQ+ movement. Although it is not exclusively a youth movement, youth has made a big impact on the movement and the movement in its turn on developments in democracies and legislation. This article sheds light on the impact that LGBTQ+ youth has had on democracies and legislation, highlighting their activism, challenges, and achievements. The article also mentions the faith of two people in their youth that made an impact on the movement in one way or another.

The LGBTQ+ youth have emerged as passionate activists, they have been challenging societal norms and advocating for equality and acceptance. Their activism encompasses a wide range of activities, including organising protests, engaging in online campaigns, and establishing support networks. In this article, we will now first have a brief look at the early formations of the movement in the late 1960:s in the USA.

In New York City in 1969, Lower Manhattan, there was a gay bar called Stonewall Inn. Unknown at the time was that during this very year, it would become an icon for the movement ahead. In the 1960:s in New York, there were repression laws against the LGBTQ+ movement and people identifying as LGBTQ+ individuals. Usually, licensed gay bars in New York in the 1960:s had to close down sooner or later or they were driven by the mafia. The police repeatedly would do raids on bars like the Stonewall Inn. On June 28th that very year, the people in the bar thought that they have had enough of repressions. When the police arrived to raid the Stonewall Inn, harassing LGBTQ+ people, people started a riot against the police. Among those involved, although it is unknown to what extent, was the back then 24-year-old Marsha P. Johnson.

During the Stonewall riots of 1969, when law enforcement raided The Stonewall Inn, Marsha P. Johnson emerged as a prominent activist and an inspirational figure, subsequently becoming a beloved role model within the LGBTQ+ movement. After the Stonewall riots, gay activists campaigned for the events to be recognized the following year. In 1970 the first pride demonstrations were held in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Worth mentioning in a Swedish context is that on the 15th of May 1971 the first demonstration for gay rights in Sweden was held in the city of Örebro. Later in June, a demonstration in memory of the Stonewall riots was held in Stockholm.

We will now have a brief look at a modern piece of legislation in favour of the LGBTQ+ movement and have a brief look at its history, at least the history that will partly explain the name of the legislation. If we fast-track the LGBTQ+ history until the 21st century, in 2009 the „Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act“ was adopted in the USA. The Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act is a federal law in the United States that broadens existing hate crime legislation. It provides additional protection and resources to address hate crimes based on race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability, allowing federal intervention when local authorities are unable or unwilling to act. The legislation is named in memory of two people exposed to hate crimes.

In 1998 a freshman student at the University of Wyoming, Matthew Shepard, who was openly gay, had recently gathered with friends to coordinate preparations for an LGBT awareness week taking place on the campus in town. Unable to convince them to join him for a drink, Matthew Shepard engaged in conversation with Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney, they were of the same age. Recognizing an opportunity, the pair targeted Shepard. McKinney admitted planning to feign homosexuality to gain Shepard’s trust, as revealed in his statement to the police. The situation ends up with Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney getting Shepard into their car, they robbed him and drove him out of the town where he was struck in the head repeatedly by them and got severe injuries eventually killing him. Shepard, who had also been tied to a fence, was not found until 18 hours after the crime scene. Shepard did not gain back consciousness but died 5 days after the attack at a hospital. The killing of Shepard changed the USA, and the federal legislation targeting hate crimes mentioned was adopted in 2009.

To end this article and sum up how the LGBTQ+ movement, and LGBTQ+ youth, have taken part in transforming democracies and legislation there are currently 34 countries where same-sex marriage is legal in the world. It is an important milestone for the movement, although there is other important legislation as well. But at least the legality of same-sex marriage in 34 countries says something about the impact of the movement. It has come with struggles for the movement, and each country has its story.

In concluding remarks, this article explored how LGBTQ+ youth have transformed democracy through their activism and achievements, mentioning the historic Stonewall riots and the path to the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act.



A Word from the President

Dear members of the Association of International Affairs in Umeå,

As I reflect on the past year, I am filled with gratitude for the remarkable journey we have undertaken together as part of UAIA. I am proud to say that our association has continued to thrive and contribute to the important work of fostering greater understanding and engagement with international affairs. Since our last issue of Utpost, we've held more interesting lectures, co-hosted Women's Rights Week and Pax Nordica, and held several social activities like Game Night and S:t Patrick's Day's Pub - just to mention a few. With only a few activities, one summer trip to Skopje, and the Almedalen week left ahead of us, it's almost time to pass the torch to the successor board.

Before doing so, I want to express my deepest appreciation to our dedicated board members, article writers, committees, and volunteers who have tirelessly worked behind the scenes to bring our initiatives to life. Your dedication has been the driving force behind this year's prosperity. Last but not least, I would like to thank all of our members. Each and every one of you. It might be a cliché, but without you - we are nothing. The association's growth this past year has challenged us to expand our reach, deepen our impact, and create even more engaging opportunities for our members. I encourage you to actively participate, share your expertise, and contribute to the vibrant tapestry of our association. Let's embrace our shared mission of evoking debates on global issues, and spreading knowledge to increase understanding, consent, and respect between people and groups from different backgrounds. Thank you for being a part of this remarkable journey.

Your President,
Michaela Eriksson Viklund

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