



Safeguarding and Strengthening Constitutional Principles in Albania: A Focus on Youth

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Abstract

Preserving and reinforcing constitutional principles in Albania is crucial for ensuring the sustainable and democratic functioning of the state. This imperative takes a particular significance when directing attention to the participation and role of young people. This study explores various aspects of this complex and timely topic, addressing challenges such as the notable absence of adequate constitutional education for the youth in Albanian society. Constitutional education stands as a cornerstone for comprehending the values and fundamental principles of a democratic society, and its deficiency poses risks to the maintenance of the rule of law and the fundamental rights of citizens. In this context, active youth participation emerges as a potential strategy to fortify constitutional principles, with a particular focus on understanding the influence of technology and social media on the constitutional awareness of the youth. The utilization of these platforms for disseminating information and stimulating discussions represents a powerful tool for increasing their awareness and engagement in constitutional matters. The study will delve into the analysis of constitutional education in schools, the involvement of young people in civic engagement, and their impact on decision-making processes. Through these analyses, the aim is to provide a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities related to the preservation and strengthening of constitutional principles in the Albanian context, with a specific emphasis on the role and participation of young people. In a time where constitutional principles form the bedrock of social order and stability, focusing on the youth becomes imperative for their preservation and reinforcement in Albania. The youth, as a pivotal segment of the population, wield an extraordinary role in shaping the future of society and cultivating a democratic culture. Constitutional education serves as a key instrument in supporting young people to comprehend constitutional structures and values. Through their active participation in decision-making processes and their influence on information distribution on social networks, they can play an essential role in preserving and implementing constitutional principles.

Keywords: Constitutional principles, Albania, youth participation, constitutional education, legal framework, democratic society, social order, decision-making, civic engagement

1. Introduction

In the context of a society that continuously evolves and experiences changes, the preservation and strengthening of constitutional principles become essential to guarantee sustainable and democratic state functioning. In Albania, this

process takes on particular significance when the focus turns to the participation and role of young people. This introduction will try to explore various aspects of this complex and actual topic.

One of the primary challenges facing Albanian society is the lack of suitable constitutional education for young people.¹ Constitutional education is fundamental for understanding the values and fundamental principles of a democratic society. When this dimension is lacking, the preservation of the rule of law and the fundamental rights of citizens is threatened.

In this context, the active participation of young people emerges as a potential strategy to reinforce these constitutional principles. To achieve this, it is essential to understand the impact of technology and social media on the constitutional awareness of young people. The use of these platforms to disseminate information and stimulate discussions can be a powerful tool to increase their awareness and engagement in constitutional matters.²

This article explores the challenges and opportunities within the field of preserving and strengthening constitutional principles in Albania, carefully considering the role of young people. Through an analysis of their engagement in social organizations, participation in public debates, and their influence on local policies, the study aims to achieve a deeper understanding of how young people can contribute to the preservation and reinforcement of constitutional principles.

Constitutional education is a key factor in helping young people understand constitutional values. Through their active participation in decision-making processes and influencing information distribution on social networks, they can play a unique role in preserving and implementing constitutional principles.

General social media consumption has a positive impact on democracy, as it allows for the dissemination of information and facilitates public discourse. The presence of diverse political viewpoints on social media contributes to democracy by promoting a range of perspectives and fostering a more inclusive public sphere. The use of social media in political campaigns can enhance democracy by increasing political engagement and mobilization among citizens.

Through the analysis of their engagement in social organizations, participation in public debates, and their influence on local policies, the goal is to achieve a deeper understanding of how young people can contribute to the preservation and reinforcement of constitutional principles.

To achieve the goals of this study, a methodology focused document analysis, and good practice cases will be employed to deepen the understanding of the complex dynamics influencing how young people can be a catalyzing force in promoting constitutional principles in Albania. Through this analysis, the aim is to contribute to the broader discourse on preserving and strengthening these principles in a context where youth participation holds particular importance.

2. Constitutional Principles Essence

Constitutional principles are the fundamental legal and political principles of any functioning society. They govern how citizens interact with the state, how power is distributed, and how individuals are governed. This includes the right to life, personal freedom, freedom of expression, and other fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Albania.³ Constitutional principles also determine the structure and functioning of state institutions. This includes the interrelationships between the legislative, executive and judicial powers, ensuring a mutual balance and check.⁴

The essence of constitutional principles includes basic principles such as the rule of law, which means that no one, including state authorities, is above the law and all are equal before the law, the independence of the judicial system, guaranteeing that judges are independent and incorruptible in their decision-making, the accountability of institutions to citizens and require transparency in government activity, reflect respect for cultural, religious, and other different forms of identity, promoting an open and tolerant society and principles includes the protection of the independence of the country, including the provision of territorial integrity.⁵

Young people constitute approximately one-third of the population in Albania, their active involvement is crucial for the country's development. Achieving this goal requires extensive efforts across various domains. Addressing the issue of low political participation necessitates a comprehensive review and enhancement of Albania institutional and legal framework at all levels, spanning from the national to the local. Additionally, scrutinizing the governance mechanisms and

¹ Conner, J. O. Cosner, K. (2016). *Youth Change Agents: Comparing the Sociopolitical Identities of Youth Organizers and Youth Commissioners*. *Democracy and Education*, 24 (1), Article 2. Available at: <https://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/vol24/iss1/2>

² Lance Y. Hunter (2023) *Social media, disinformation, and democracy: how different types of social media usage affect democracy cross-nationally*, *Democratization*, 30:6, 1040-1072, DOI: 10.1080/13510347.2023.2208355

³ Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania. (1998), <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/635d44bd-96ee-4bc5-8d93-d928cf6f2abd>

⁴ Article 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Albania. (1998), <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/635d44bd-96ee-4bc5-8d93-d928cf6f2abd>

⁵ Art. 3 Constitution of the Republic of Albania. (1998), <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/635d44bd-96ee-4bc5-8d93-d928cf6f2abd>

processes inherent in these institutions is essential. The objective is to transform young people into a significant influencing factor and establish youth structures affiliated with both central and local government bodies.⁶ The rule of law is the core of a society where the law is applied without exception, while constitutional content establishes key principles and values.⁷ Constitutional education enables young people to grasp the significance of lawfulness and contribute to the protection of legal order in their society.

The focus on youth in preserving and strengthening constitutional principles in Albania represents an investment in the future, preparing an informed, responsible, and engaged generation for the construction and protection of society's fundamental values.

3. The Role of Youth in Preserving Constitutional Principles: Challenges and Opportunities

Focusing on the youth, as a significant society category, addresses the challenges and opportunities in preserving and strengthening these principles. The youth trust in the rule of law and democratic institutions is very important.

The principle of judicial independence is one of the most fundamental for ensuring justice and upholding the rule of law. For young people, this independence is linked to fostering trust in judicial institutions and creating an environment where they feel equal before the law.

The principle of respecting fundamental rights and freedoms ensures the protection of individual integrity and dignity, including basic rights to expression, belief, and movement.

A robust constitutional education can empower young people to understand their rights and play an active role in their protection through participation in public debates and civil organizations.

The principle of government accountability and transparency establishes the basis for effective and just governance. Through engagement in civil organizations and participation in decision-making processes in local and central government, young people can demand accountability from public institutions and contribute in building a more transparent and accountable governance. Young people play a crucial role in preserving constitutional principles in society. Youth have the potential to actively participate in political and social life. Their involvement in democratic processes and civil organizations can help ensure and preserve constitutional principles. Educating young people about constitutional principles and values contributes in raising their awareness for the importance of protecting these principles. This can be translated into a continuous commitment to respect and preserve the constitution as a whole.

Organizations and institutions can offer educational activities to help young people understand constitutional values. These activities can include civic education lessons by law experts, university professors training young people with specific lesson plans, and providing guidelines on the Constitution.

Such initiatives have been shown to be beneficial for both the students involved and the local community⁸. By actively engaging in teaching the Constitution, young people become more knowledgeable about its content and principles. Since 2009, Arkansas students have been working with local schools to do civic education lessons for Constitution Day⁹

Additionally, these activities create memorable experiences for young students and contribute to their understanding of civic and constitutional values. Furthermore, researchers has shown that legal and moral values play a significant role in shaping the behavior of young people in the process of the realization or fulfillment of their potentialities.

Therefore, educational activities that focus on constitutional principles can have a positive impact on youth consciousness and their interaction with the society. Youth can bring new and innovative ideas to protect and advance law and constitutional principles. Their participation in societal dialogue and debate can create new spaces for discussions and creative solutions. Young people can engage in civil organizations and projects that aim to promote constitutional rights and combat their violations¹⁰. This participation can be an effective means to raise awareness and mobilize public opinion. Youth can play an active role in monitoring the activities of public institutions to ensure they

⁶ Political, Social and Economic Participation of Young People in Albania https://partnersalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/raport_i_vjetor_YBH-shqip.pdf

⁷ Constitution of the Republic of Albania. (1998), <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/635d44bd-96ee-4bc5-8d93-d928cf6f2abd> , Part 1, Fundamental Principles

⁸ Pevtsova, Elena & Anatolievna, Umnova-Koniukhova & Aleshkova, Irina. (2022). Do constitutional principles affect self-realization of the youth? RUDN Journal of Law. 26. 611-633. 10.22363/2313-2337-2022-26-3, 615.

⁹ Rogers, Michael. 2023. "Constitution Day Activities as Community Engagement." APSA Preprints. doi: 10.33774/apsa-2023-pzt43-v2. This content is a preprint and has not been peer-reviewed.

¹⁰ See <https://debate.scidevcenter.org/home-page-edicioni-2022-2023/>

respect and adhere to constitutional principles. The use of technology and social media can aid in this process.

Social media has varying effects on democracy. General social media consumption, the presence of diverse political viewpoints, and the use of social media in political campaigns strengthen democracy. However, social media disinformation, online political polarization, and the use of social media to organize offline violence reduce overall levels of democracy. Information manipulation by a social media platform can undermine democracy and influence voting outcomes.¹¹

Social media use is correlated with higher satisfaction with democracy when a country's democracy is more robust, but as democratic backsliding occurs, social media use is correlated with lower satisfaction with democracy. Social media platforms provide a space for political discussions, allowing users to engage in social issues, discuss politicians' public image, and attempt to change perceptions. In this way, young people have the potential to serve as catalysts and defenders of constitutional principles, ensuring that society is conscious and involved in safeguarding the fundamental values of a nation.

In many countries, including Albania, there are various challenges that threaten constitutional principles. The principles of constitutionalism, such as the division of powers, guarantee of fundamental rights, and representative democracy, are examined in the context of modern statehood¹². Albania, in particular, faces challenges in developing a real democracy and aligning itself with European integration. These challenges may arise from political, social, economic factors, or their interactions. Some common challenges include:

In some cases, the executive, legislative, or even judicial powers may not respect their constitutional limits. This can lead to violations of fundamental principles and undermine constitutional order. High levels of corruption and poverty can lead to violations of constitutional principles, depriving citizens of their rights and freedoms. Discrimination based on gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or any other characteristic can pose significant challenges to constitutional principles advocating for equality and nondiscrimination.

In specific situations, such as during emergencies or conflict, there may be threats to citizens' fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and assembly. Changes in society, economic and technological developments may necessitate constitutional reforms.

However, these reforms should respect and strengthen fundamental principles, not diminish or violate them. It is crucial for society to be attentive to these challenges and work towards protecting and improving constitutional principles, as they are the essence of a just and free state.

4. Strengthening Youth Civic Engagement through Constitutional Education

Strengthening youth civic engagement through constitutional education is an effective way to raise awareness and involve young people in political and social life. Implementing a sustainable constitutional education program in high schools and middle schools ensures that young people understand the core values and principles of their country's constitution. This program can include specific teaching hours, discussions, and projects involving students in understanding these concepts. The study of youth, political literacy, and civic activism is both a complex undertaking and normatively loaded according to this brief historical overview of the study of the political socialization process and the acquisition of political knowledge. The research demands rigor in design but the exploration of new venues for a better understanding of those agents, activities, and interactions that shape young people's visions of the political world and their choice to participate or not participate in it. There is a need for a better understanding of politics and how we can link it to civic engagement.¹³

There has been a wide-ranging debate about the impact of citizenship education on young people's political engagement and participation across Britain over the past two decades.

Using data from a survey of 1025 young people at the time of the 2010 General Election, we examined the impact that studying for a formal qualification in General Certificate of Secondary Education in Citizenship Studies has on young people's political and civic engagement. The results show that there are many differences between the two groups in terms of their political perspectives as well as their past and future patterns of political participation, based on the

¹¹ Matthew Placek (2024) *Social media, quality of democracy, and citizen satisfaction with democracy in central and eastern Europe*, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 21:1, 6-22, DOI: 10.1080/19331681.2023.2220319, p.4

¹² Mangiameli, S. (2019). *State, European integration, and globalization. New challenges for constitutionalism*. *Humanities and rights global network journal*, 1(1), 167.

¹³ Robert L. Dudley; Alan R. Gitelson; "Political Literacy, Civic Education, and Civic Engagement: A Return to Political Socialization?", *Applied Developmental Science*, 2002

hypothesis that those young people who took the course would be more engaged than those who did not.¹⁴

Organizing specialized workshops and seminars on constitutional issues can help raise awareness and mobilize young people.¹⁵ This participatory format is conducive to sharing experiences and developing knowledge on important constitutional topics.

Exploiting technology and social media to disseminate information on constitutional issues can be powerful. Online campaigns, blogs, and social networks can be used to communicate and discuss relevant issues with a wide audience of young people.

Incentivizing local and community projects related to constitutional issues can encourage the participation of young people in solving local challenges based on constitutional principles.

Collaborating with civil society organizations dealing with constitutional issues and human rights can bring new opportunities for youth engagement. These organizations in collaboration with educational institutions can offer training, activities, and platforms for participation.

Organizing constitutional contests, debates, and other events can create an atmosphere of open discussions and encourage young people to express their views and be part of public debates. In the university context, these curricular and extracurricular activities are increasing, but they should be referred more to high schools.¹⁶

Establishing mentorship programs where young people are guided by professionals or individuals with experience in constitutional matters can help in their development and raise awareness about the importance of active participation in society.

Strengthening youth civic engagement through constitutional education requires a continuous focus on improving school curricula, creating the right environment for discussions and participation, and providing opportunities for young people to express and develop their potential in constitutional society.¹⁷

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, our analysis yields valuable insights into the promotion of youth civic engagement through constitutional education. The role of constitutional literacy in shaping informed and participatory citizens cannot be overstated. Building on the recommendations provided, it is essential to underscore the importance of sustained efforts in this domain.

In conclusion, the preservation and strengthening of constitutional principles in Albania require a multifaceted approach, with a specific focus on engaging and educating young people. The challenges faced by Albanian society, such as the lack of suitable constitutional education for the youth, underscore the urgency of addressing this issue. Constitutional education emerges as a key factor in empowering young individuals to understand and actively participate in upholding democratic values. The essence of constitutional principles, including judicial independence, respect for fundamental rights, government accountability, transparency, and the rule of law, forms the bedrock of a just and free society. Focusing on the youth is not only an investment in the future but also a strategic move to ensure the continuity of democratic values. Through active participation, constitutional education, and leveraging technology and social media, young people can play a transformative role in preserving and reinforcing these principles.

In terms of recommendations:

- Implement comprehensive constitutional education programs in schools, ensuring that students understand the values and principles of democracy from an early age.
- Develop user-friendly online platforms, apps, and social media campaigns to disseminate information on constitutional matters, making it accessible and engaging for young audiences.
- Encourage the inclusion of young people in decision-making processes at local and national levels, fostering a sense of responsibility and ownership in governance.¹⁸
- Provide financial and organizational support for youth-led initiatives, such as constitutional contests, debates, and community projects, to encourage active participation and innovation.
- Create mentorship programs where young individuals can learn from experienced professionals in constitutional matters, fostering a sense of guidance and inspiration.

¹⁴ Ana Isabel Pontes; Matt Henn; M. Griffiths; "Youth Political (dis)engagement and The Need for Citizenship Education: Encouraging Young People's Civic and Political Participation Through The Curriculum", *Education, Citizenship And Social Justice*, 2019.

¹⁵ See UNESCO's Youth Programme, <https://www.unesco.org/en/youth/engagement>

¹⁶ <https://debate.scidevcenter.org/home-page-edicioni-2022-2023/>

¹⁷ Law No. 75/2019, "For youth", Article 1.

¹⁸ Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, <https://rm.coe.int/168071b4d6>

- Strengthen collaboration with civil society organizations working on constitutional issues, leveraging their expertise and resources to enhance youth engagement.
- Advocate for the integration of constitutional studies in pre-university education, ensuring that young people are equipped with essential knowledge before entering higher education.
- Continuously evaluate the impact of civic education programs on young people's political engagement and participation, refining strategies based on research findings.
- Incentivize local and community projects addressing constitutional issues, providing a platform for young people to apply their knowledge in solving real-world challenges.
- Work collaboratively with educational institutions to continually improve school curricula, ensuring that constitutional education remains relevant and impactful.

By implementing these recommendations, Albania can nurture an informed, responsible, and engaged generation capable of preserving and strengthening constitutional principles, through a responsible and educated participation in public life contributing to the growth of a sustainable and democratic society.

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