



POWER2YOUTH

Explaining Youth Participation and Non-Participation in Morocco

Saloua Zerhouni,
Mohammed V University in Rabat



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Methodology	
1. Youth Participation in Context	5
2. Modes of Political Participation and Expression	7
2.1 Informed about and Interested in Politics	
2.2 Weak Participation through Organizations	
2.3 Growing Interest in Electoral Participation	
2.4 A Preference for “Unconventional” Ways of Participation	
3. Explaining Youth Non-Participation	13
3.1 The Centrality of Monarchical Power	
3.2 Mistrust in Institutions	
3.3 Political Exclusion and State Control over Spaces of Participation	
Conclusion	16
References	18

Explaining Youth Participation and Non-Participation in Morocco

Saloua Zerhouni¹

Abstract

Based on both recent statistics from a national survey and qualitative interviews, the paper analyses the level and modalities of youth participation in Morocco's public sphere. While individual characteristics such as education, gender, political interest and political knowledge are important for understanding the phenomenon of participation and non-participation, it is argued that contextual factors of youth participation matter. Our data demonstrate weak interest and engagement in the arena of traditional, formal politics. This sphere has become so discredited over the years that participation through political parties and elections is now being perceived by a majority of young people as meaningless. Instead Moroccan youth favour different forms of "politics from below" such as voicing one's opinion on the Internet and in political protests. In this respect, our findings mirror those of other studies. Youth activism in Morocco is not primarily defined by the formal spaces of participation; rather, it is about the degree of influence that they can exercise through one venue or another. The institutional setting plays a major role in obstructing young people's political participation, particularly their involvement in formal politics.

Keywords: Youth | Morocco | Domestic policy | Elections

INTRODUCTION

Since December 2010, the massive involvement of young people in the wave of protests that swept most Arab countries has triggered renewed interest in youth politics. In Morocco as in other countries in the region, the dominant narrative in the media and academia had often portrayed youth as politically inactive. Most of the studies conducted on youth showed a consistent trend of weak political participation and limited membership in political parties and unions. Very often, low rates of voting and engagement through formal politics were referred to as evidence of youth political apathy (Bourqia et al. 1995).

Recent youth research studies in Morocco have shown that the argument about "political apathy" is no longer sustainable. Drawing on both qualitative and quantitative survey techniques, a number of studies have attempted to broaden our perception of the ways in which young people engage in political and civic life. For instance, a number of empirical studies indicate that while the youth turn away from formal, "mainstream" politics, they do remain interested in politics and engage differently (Zerhouni 2009). More recent forms of mobilization during the so-called "Arab Spring" have also shown that youth "do politics in a different way". They participate in marches, organize sit-ins, and post their ideas on blogs. In order to understand the different articulations of youth participation and non-participation and to capture the complexities of what "doing politics" might mean for young people, we should take into consideration the interplay between the formal and informal spheres of

¹ Saloua Zerhouni is associate professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat.

politics (Zerhouni and Akesbi 2016).

Research on youth participation in Morocco does not offer satisfying answers concerning what factors determine youth “participation” and “non-participation”. When explaining youth involvement in politics, most of the studies refer to individual factors, such as age, level of education, income and political interest. Little attempt is made to explore the impact of contextual factors such as the nature of political authority, and how the concentration of power may impact the degree of youth participation. I would like to stress here that a better understanding of youth participation and non-participation in Morocco requires us to take more seriously the contextual perspective. Factors such as education, gender, political interest and political knowledge are important. However, they remain insufficient in scrutinizing the complexities of youth participation. The centrality of power, a discredited political elite and the institutional design are all important factors to account for the nature of political participation and the decision to participate or not.

Empirical findings from our quantitative survey show that many young people are politicized and they continue to be interested in and informed about politics. But they are less active in political parties and trade unions. More of them have a preference for activism through informal means of participation (protest, social media, etc.). However, more than half of the respondents are neither interested in politics nor engaged in any form of participation. The low level of youth engagement has clearly more to do with distrust in political institutions than distrust in democratic institutions as a means of governance. Most of the youth believe in their agency; nevertheless, in a regime characterized by the centrality of power in the hands of the monarchy/*makhzen* and a controlled partisan scene, youth are aware of the limits of their influence through formal politics. Moreover, the experiences of political exclusion and marginalization that young people are confronted with create obstacles and disincentives to participation.

The paper will briefly present youth participation in its political context. Then, drawing on recent empirical data, it will examine modes of youth participation and political expression. Finally, the paper will present factors that explain youth non-participation in Morocco.

Methodology

This paper will draw on both qualitative and quantitative data collected within the framework of the project Power2Youth. The qualitative data come from focus groups and interviews that were conducted between April and October 2015. Five focus groups were organized in four different cities: two in Rabat, one in Casablanca, one in Tangier and the last one in Marrakech. The participants in this study predominantly belong to the 18-29 age group with a few aged 30-39. A total of 40 young people participated in the focus groups and 30 individual interviews were conducted. The total sample comprises 25 young women and 45 young men. Interviewees were either university students or holders of a BA or an MA degree. The majority of the focus group participants were employed.

As for quantitative data, a national survey was conducted between December 2015 and January 2016. The sample comprises 1,022 young people in the age range 18-29: 502 males and 520 females; 336 individuals aged 18-21, 377 individuals aged 22-25 and 309 individuals

aged 26-29. In terms of their level of education, 25 percent of respondents had not completed basic education, 22.7 percent had completed basic, 35.8 percent had attained secondary and 16.5 percent had accomplished post-secondary education. In terms of their activity, 48 percent reported work as their main activity, while 22.6 percent were unemployed (about three quarters of whom were job seekers), 18.5 percent were students while 10.2 percent reported being housewives. Of the respondents, 14.6 percent reported living in a household whose economic standing was above average (by national standards), 71.8 percent said their household was average, while 13.6 percent reported their household to be poorer than the average Moroccan household.

1. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN CONTEXT

In order to have a full grasp of youth participation in Morocco, it is important to start with the historical context in which it has evolved. Youth activism in formal politics has been characterized by alternating phases of mobilization and demobilization. From a historical perspective, during the colonial period in Morocco (1912-1956), youth were largely mobilized against colonial powers and in support of the establishment of constitutional rule. The nationalist elite was made up mainly of young educated urban elites. With the adoption of its first constitution in 1962, rights to engage in public life through different channels were established. Moroccans, including the young people, had the right to vote, to run for elections and to adhere to or form a political party or a union. The regime created a parliament, guaranteed a multiparty system, and since 1963, has organized regular elections.

The state creation of diverse venues of formal participation was intertwined with a strategy of tight control over these spaces through the use of repression or through the orchestration of parties and labour union fragmentation. Indeed, youth activism through party politics was highly circumscribed. To a large extent, it was the use of repression against youth activists in leftist political parties in the 1960s and the 1970s that eventually determined their demobilization (individually or collectively) in favour of informal politics and away from established political institutions. During the first three decades of the rule of the late King Hassan II, only young people engaged in state-sponsored organizations were able to participate.

In the 1990s, the monarchy took various initiatives in its attempt to enlarge the space of political participation and to ensure more freedom of expression. Two constitutional revisions were adopted. The parliament's prerogatives were strengthened with the 1996 constitutional reform, which established a bicameral system to replace the unicameral one. The opposition parties were called upon to compose a coalition government and the moderate Islamists were allowed to integrate with an existing political party and to participate in electoral politics. The elections were held under relatively transparent conditions and associational life flourished.

Despite this political opening, youth membership in political parties remained weak. A survey of Moroccan students in the early 1990s showed that only one in ten were members of a political party (Bourqia et al. 1995). Low engagement through institutional politics did not mean that youth were not interested in politics, however. In fact, the urban educated youth opted for more informal means of political expression. They engaged by occupying the public

space and by becoming more active within grassroots movements and associations such as the unemployed graduates.

With the arrival in power of King Mohammed VI in 1999, the discourse about the importance of political participation became more pronounced. In a number of speeches, he called on Moroccans to carry out their civic duty by voting and called on political parties to improve their internal governance and to open up the space for youth and women's representation in their organizational structure. In 2003, the voting age was lowered to eighteen. A party bill was adopted in 2006 specifying the proportion of youth and women to be represented in the executive bodies of political parties. In the same vein, and in response to higher rates of electoral abstention, the state reinforced its efforts to mobilize the electorate. Young people were a major target of a state-run campaign for voting. Despite these efforts, the rate of abstention reached its peak in the 2007 legislative elections. An empirical study conducted among Moroccan students indicated that the young people's disenchantment with the political offer was the main reason behind their abstention (Zerhouni 2009).

With the 2011 mobilizations in different parts of the Middle East, the youth in Morocco became more active through protest actions. In a context of highly discredited political parties and labour unions, a youth-led movement, the February 20th Movement (M20), called for nationwide protest. Inspired by the revolts in Tunisia and Egypt and aided by Internet connections and social media, thousands of young Moroccans joined the movement and became active in the protests. The movement was composed of a mixed group of opposition forces with different ideological backgrounds, ranging from left and radical left-wing political parties to Islamist movements.² Despite their divergent political orientations and expectations from change, the Moroccan youth were able to cooperate and to reach some consensus as far as their main demands were concerned. The movement asked for a democratic constitution, the independence of the judiciary and the media as well as the separation of wealth and power.³ To make their voice heard, the youth of the movement occupied the streets.

In response to the demonstrations that took place in early 2011, King Mohammed VI reformed the constitution, organized early legislative elections and brought in figures from the former opposition Party of Justice and Development (PJD) to lead the government. The 2011 constitution established a Consultative Council of Youth and Community Work and introduced the principle of consultation with civil society organizations in designing, implementing and evaluating public policies. Following the 2011 legislative elections, the House of Representatives reserved 30 seats on the national list for young people. Moreover, more spaces were created by the regime to provide the young people and citizens at large with channels to voice their opinions and to influence policies and legislation. Yet this political space that is open for youth remains part of a controlled domain of formal political institutions rather than the autonomous space that youth often aspire to have.

² The most active and involved among these groups were the Islamist movement of *al-Adlwa-l-Ihsan* (Justice and Charity), the United Socialist Union (PSU) and the Moroccan Association of Human Rights (AMDH). The M20 was also composed of those who called themselves independents, meaning here youth with no political affiliation.

³ Unlike protest movements in other Arab states, M20 has maintained its call for "reform" rather than for the "overthrow" of the regime.

The adopted reforms brought improvements in certain areas, in particular with regard to enshrining human rights. Yet, the constitutional reform did not establish the proclaimed parliamentary monarchy that many of the young protestors were asking for. Rather, an “executive monarchy”, in which the King retains significant powers over strategic issues, was maintained.⁴ In Morocco, the regime has shown its reluctance to introduce genuine political reform. In the 1990s, the late King was keen on ensuring a peaceful monarchical transition and portraying an image of a *democratizing* Morocco. Recent regional dynamics and societal pressures have put a significant strain on the current King to introduce constitutional reforms. Yet, the regime has remained faithful to its homeopathic style of introducing reforms, as well as its approach of keeping tight control over the reform process, thus preventing any structural changes or significant reductions in the powers of the monarch.

It is within this context of a centralized form of power intertwined with some form of political liberalization that youth activism should be understood. Faced with various forms of control if not repression, youth activism has indeed been historically dispersed, atomized and characterized by the constant interplay between formal and informal modes of political participation. When excluded from or marginalized within established institutions, the young people create their own spaces to do politics. More recently, the “street” as well as virtual and artistic spaces have served as spaces of participation. Different studies have shown that young people are interested in politics and public issues; however, more and more young people are not participating and do not mobilize through the existing channels. There is a general perception among the youth and Moroccans in general that the parties, the parliament and the government are weak and do not serve the interests of the people. The diversity and plurality of spaces of participation are not creating a favourable environment to influence politics. In Morocco, the overall context is not open for the young people to be politically active and influential.

2. MODES OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND EXPRESSION

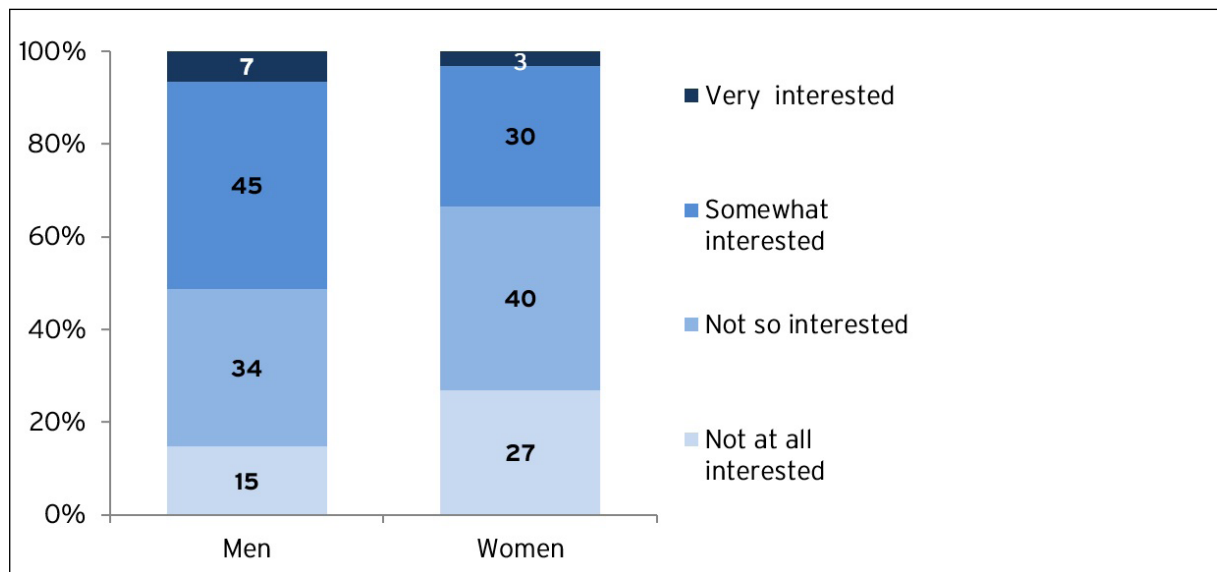
The literature on citizen participation offers various classifications of the modes through which people get involved in politics. Scholars distinguish between “conventional” and “unconventional” (Barnes et al. 1979), “formal” and “informal” forms of participation. Here I consider the interplay between these different modes of participation. Participation is defined both in terms of engagement in institutional politics, civic participation and protest activities. Our research provides a number of insights into the forms of participation that Moroccan young people embrace, and informs about the degree of interest in political issues. In terms of youth forms of political engagement, both the qualitative and quantitative research that we have conducted confirm that there is a noticeable tendency of weak participation among youth in formal politics. The youth seem to be more interested in activism through informal channels.

⁴ The King can still dissolve Parliament and dismiss ministers, and he chairs the Council of Ministers when strategic issues are discussed. He is the head of the Supreme Judicial Council and the newly created National Security Council, and he remains the supreme arbiter among political actors. For more on the limits of the 2011 constitutional reform in Morocco, see Madani et al. (2012).

2.1 Informed about and Interested in Politics

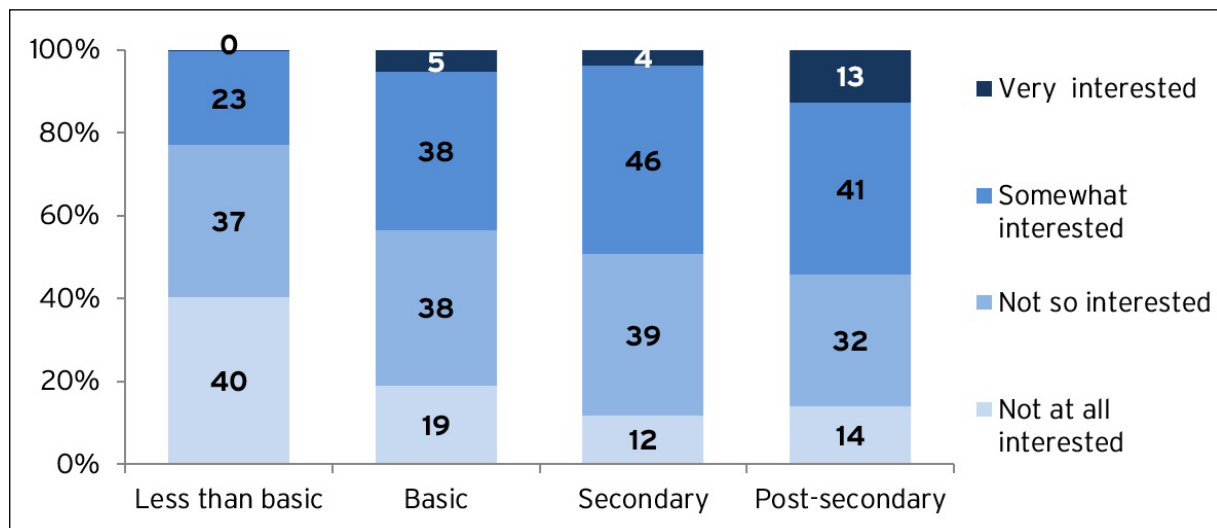
Despite the thesis which argues that the youth in Morocco are depoliticized, empirical findings from the national survey show that there is a significant interest in politics among many young people. Forty-two percent of respondents declare being “very” or “somewhat” interested in politics (Figure 1). Political interest is higher among men than women (respectively 52 and 33 percent very or somewhat interested).

Figure 1 | Political interest by gender. Percentage.



Political interest increases with education from 23 and 43 percent among people with respectively less than basic and secondary education, to 54 percent among young university graduates and people with other post-secondary education (Figure 2).

Figure 2 | Political interest by educational attainment. Percentage.



Moreover, the majority of youth in our sample seem to be informed about politics and get the news through a variety of channels. National television and the Internet are the most common sources of political information for Moroccan youth: 93 percent of respondents watch the news on national channels (50 percent sometimes and 43 percent often). The use of the Internet to access news and information is also widespread amongst young Moroccans and they follow blogs (71 percent), use Facebook (79 percent) and access other Internet media (77 percent). More than half use national radio to stay informed (44 percent from time to time and 11 percent often). National printed newspapers and magazines are used by 40 percent of young Moroccans sometimes (36 percent) or often (4 percent) to get news and stay informed.

Less than half of the respondents consider that they have a very good (4 percent) or pretty good (38 percent) understanding of political issues. The perception of having such understanding increases with educational attainment (61 percent amongst individuals with a post-secondary degree contrasted with 24 percent amongst those who have not completed basic schooling). Despite the fact that young Moroccans show interest in politics and diversify their means of information, the majority do not engage through institutionalized politics.

2.2 Weak Participation through Organizations

The state in Morocco has created diverse venues of participation. With its first constitution in 1962, a multiparty system was established and the right to form a union was recognized. Over the years, the number of political parties and unions has increased, paralleled by a relatively dynamic partisan life. The main union which symbolized youth activism was the General Union of Moroccan Students (*Union nationale des étudiants marocains*, UNEM). It was established in 1956 and played a major role in youth mobilization and participation during the 1960s and the 1970s.⁵

Despite a plural partisan scene, youth activism through party politics has been very weak. Only a few political parties such as the Party of Independence (PI), the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) and the Party of Justice and Development (PJD) have youth sections. Youth representation in the governing structures of political parties has remained insignificant despite the provisions of the 2006 party bill. More importantly, several studies have demonstrated that the younger generations do not adhere to political parties in a massive way. For instance, the Rabat Research and Sociological Studies Group, following a survey of 865 students in 1995, showed that only 15.1 percent belonged to an association and among these 131 young people, merely 7 individuals or less than 1 percent, were members of a political association.⁶

In accordance with recent quantitative analysis, our research confirms that young people's participation through organizations continues to be very weak. Indeed, only 12 percent of all young people (16 percent of men and 9 percent of women) are members of at least one organization (such as a political party or trade union). This tendency is not specific to Moroccan youth. Scholars have pointed to the preference of youth in different countries to participate in less hierarchical organizations and more through informal networks (Inglehart

⁵ The UNEM has been subject to many divisions throughout its history. Ideological divergences among its members and organizational conflicts have contributed to its weakening.

⁶ The 1995 study of the Rabat Research and Sociological Studies Group was published in Bourqia (2000).

1997, Stolle et al. 2005).

In Morocco, different factors can explain youth's weak membership in political parties. First, most of the political parties lack internal democracy. Participants in the qualitative interviews and who were members of political parties were very critical of the practices of bad governance within their own organizations. They spoke of the pressure and oppression they faced. Oppression came from the leading elites who consider them as "young children". Thus, membership in political parties does not allow the youth to "get in" and to influence politics and policies. According to our survey, only 40 percent believe that political parties appreciate the membership and participation of young people.

Secondly, the main political parties, with the exception of the PJD, have lost their credibility and are perceived as weak by the majority of Moroccans, including the younger generations. Youth non-engagement through party politics could be explained by the way they perceive the latter. According to the survey, only one in ten thinks that political parties might influence matters of interest to young people.

Thirdly, there is a dominant perception that politicians are disconnected from the lives and concerns of young people. Almost 70 percent of participants in the survey are of the opinion that politicians pay too little attention to issues of relevance to young people.

2.3 Growing Interest in Electoral Participation

Despite the fact that youth in Morocco are very critical of party politics, the survey shows that 56 percent of respondents aged 26-29 participated in the 2011 parliamentary elections (many younger people had not reached voting age at that time). Participation in the 2015 local elections was even higher. Fifty-two percent of all respondents voted during that election (the youngest people had not reached voting age). There was no gender difference, but voting increased by age and reached 63 percent among young men and women aged 26-29. This changing behaviour confirms the results of a qualitative survey conducted in 2012 among young Moroccans. When asked about their intent to vote in the 2015 local elections, the majority of participants expressed their will to vote (National Democratic Institute 2012: 20).

Sixty percent of those who voted perceive of this act first and foremost as a duty. These results indicate a major change in the electoral behaviour of Moroccans in general. Previous studies have demonstrated that "providing services" was one of the main motives for the people's voting behaviour in countries such as Morocco, Egypt and Jordan (Shehata 2008, Lust-Okar 2008). Eighteen percent of those who voted said they wanted change whilst 10 percent said they gave support to the incumbents. Only 8 percent said they voted after pressure from family and friends. When asked about their intent to vote in the 2016 parliamentary elections, 37 percent said they would vote for sure (absolutely) and 20 percent declared that they would probably vote. Only 8 percent expressed they would absolutely not vote. There is slightly stronger interest in voting among young people with higher education (47 percent would vote for sure) and those residing in households with an above-average economic standing (also 47 percent).

These statistics raise an important question: Is there a growing interest among young Moroccans in electoral participation? Previous studies have shown that youth were less interested in the act of voting. For instance, the survey conducted by Palmer and Nedelcovych between 1978 and 1979 on 500 students from Mohammed V University in Rabat found that only 25 percent of respondents had participated in the 1976 local elections and to a lesser extent (3 percent) in the 1977 parliamentary elections (Palmer and Nedelcovych 1984). Moreover, statistics about the electorate show very low rates of youth registration on electoral lists. In Morocco, voter registration is a prerequisite for exercising the right to vote. The Electoral Code does not oblige citizens to register and it is a voluntary act for anyone reaching the voting age (18 years). Since the 2002 legislative elections, awareness campaigns have been conducted by the Ministry of the Interior to encourage Moroccans, especially young people, to register on the electoral rolls. Enrolment is considered a measure of voter turnout. With the natural population growth, the reduction of the electoral age of majority from 20 to 18 years in 2002, and with the possibility for Moroccans living abroad to register (2007), the electorate should have increased considerably, especially its youth component.⁷

According to the High Commission for Planning (*Haut Commissariat au Plan*, HCP), out of a population of 19.9 million Moroccans who had reached voting age in the 2007 legislative elections, 48 percent were under 35 years old (HCP 2007). When we look at the composition of the electorate, only 9 percent of the registered voters were aged 18-24. To put this figure in perspective, it should be noted that by cross-checking the figures of the HCP, Moroccans between the ages of 18 and 24 represent almost 37 percent of the Kingdom's active population. During the 2011 legislative elections, the rate of registered voters aged 18-24 was even lower (only 7 percent).

The findings of our survey raise a number of important questions. For example, is the growing interest in electoral participation the result of the touch of credibility that the PJD has added to the partisan scene/electoral process⁸ or does it reflect a change in the electoral behaviour of young Moroccans and their reconciliation with voting as a means of participation and influence?

What we can advance in terms of the implications of these results is that youth political engagement in Morocco is driven by a sense of "agency": there is a sense that young people want to exert an influence on decision-making processes. Indeed, 61 percent of the respondents in our survey think that their own participation "can make a difference and have an impact, even if small, on political decisions in Morocco". Fifty-five percent of the respondents believe that young Moroccans are able to impact national politics very much (10 percent) or much

⁷ Despite these measures, non-registration persists. In 2002, enrollments were in the order of 13,884,467. This increased to 15,546,789 in 2007 and then went back to 13,420,631 during the 2011 legislative elections. With the 2016 legislative elections, and following the revision of electoral list by the Ministry of Interior, the number of registered voter reached 15,702,592.

⁸ A study on youth political participation in Morocco showed that the most known Moroccan party is the PJD. It comes in first with 24 percent. Its popularity is linked to the media coverage the party has enjoyed since entering the institutionalized political scene in 1996. The communication skills of Benkirane, the PJD leader, have also played an important role in attracting different fringes of Moroccan society. The social action and the mobilization campaigns the party organized during the various electoral *rendez-vous* also contributed to its popularity (Zerhouni 2009).

(45 percent). A slightly higher percentage think that they can influence local politics very much (11 percent) or much (48 percent).

2.4 A Preference for “Unconventional” Ways of Participation

Most of the studies conducted on youth political participation in Morocco have shown that the majority have a preference for unconventional modes of participation. For instance, the study by Palmer and Nedelcovych (1984) demonstrated that 30 percent of the respondents aimed to exert their influence through forms of protest and 11 percent were divided between strike, write to the press, or contact officials.

Survey findings show that 29 percent of all respondents (38 percent of men and 20 percent of women) have participated in less formal ways and were part of a group of people who have “done good” or tried to solve a problem in their own local community. Our qualitative interviews confirm this tendency. They are many who engage through informal politics. The latter gives youth a sense that they are part of the political process and that their voice is being heard. Moreover, engagement through informal channels provides youth with a more flexible space in which they have more freedom to express themselves. A female participant who was active through *sbagha fi zanka* (art in the street) shared:

We have more freedom to act, especially when it is informal. [...] If it was within the framework of an association or if the activity emanated from a political party, we would have a certain set of procedures to respect, guidelines to follow. [...] Now our activity is rather open.

For other participants who engage through informal modes, they think that “occupying the street” is the best way to reach out to the people and to sensitize them. Networking with other groups and youth associations was also mentioned. For a blogger, youth could be mobilized through their passions and hobbies. Youth have a great potential and, if given the opportunity, they have the capacity to achieve exceptional things. Indeed, the virtual sphere has provided Moroccan youth with a space to express their views and communicate freely. They take advantage of connection tools to create new spaces to socialize, network, play and voice their demands and grievances. Youth communicate through forums, blogs and YouTube videos. They generate their own media content and act as citizen journalists by presenting counter-narratives to the official media. Our survey shows that 11 percent considered themselves (at one point in the past, at least) as “Internet activists” (15 percent of men and 7 percent of women).

Protest actions were also mentioned as a means through which youth engage in politics. Ten percent (13 percent of men and 7 percent of women) say they sympathized with a protest movement at the time of the interview and 3 percent felt they were part of such a movement. The percentage that sympathizes and supports a protest movement is higher among people from economically better-off households and among those with higher education. Seven percent report having ever signed a petition and another 37 percent say they might do so in the future. A much higher share of respondents who have attained education beyond secondary than respondents with other educational backgrounds have signed a petition (21 percent versus 3-6 percent). Five percent have ever participated in a boycott. Nine percent

(12 percent of men and 7 percent of women) have ever attended a peaceful demonstration. The percentage of individuals who have done this is way above average among people with a post-secondary degree (28 percent) and very low among those with basic or lower education (2 percent). Seven percent have ever participated in a strike.

Low rates of youth involvement through protest actions contradict the findings of a study by sociologist Aberrahmane Rachik (2014) on social movements in Morocco. Rachik showed that Moroccans in general, including youth, have become fervent adepts of protest. Protest actions, whether the organization of sit-ins, demonstrations or marches, rose significantly between 2005 and 2012. Rachik states that 17,000 protest actions took place in Morocco in 2012, an average of 52 actions per day.

3. EXPLAINING YOUTH NON-PARTICIPATION

Findings from our survey show that the majority of youth are neither active through established institutions, such as political parties and unions (12 percent), nor through alternative modes of political action (29 percent). This begs the question if non-participation is the expression of political apathy or if it is instead a sign of disenchantment with politics. More importantly, does it reflect a rational and conscious decision to not take part in a game that youth no longer adhere to? To understand youth non-participation, multiple and interrelated factors should be taken into account.

3.1 The Centrality of Monarchical Power

Morocco is a constitutional monarchy in which the king has ultimate authority. Since independence, the regime has kept up a seemingly democratic façade of multiparty politics and electoral competition. The long tradition of multiparty politics has neither led to the rationalization of the partisan sphere nor to the establishment of a democratic culture among its elites. Indeed, power relations are based more on patronage and nepotism. Moreover, the electoral process is regularly held under the effective control and orchestration of an undemocratic state. The 2016 contest continues to show that the state still intervenes in various ways to manipulate the partisan scene and the process of elections. For instance, different political parties denounced the irregularities and state support for the Party of Authenticity and Modernity, PAM (a party founded in 2008 by a close friend of the king). Thus, the neutrality of the state and the transparency of the elections are still challenges to be dealt with. What is clear is that the Moroccan political scene continues to provide us with a peculiar context whereby techniques and procedures associated with democracy help sustain an undemocratic system of rule.

While some young people we met try to integrate existing spaces of participation or to create their own spaces, the majority are aware of the predominance of the monarchical institution and the reality of power relations. A male activist in the Unified Socialist Party in Rabat stated: "The king concentrates all powers, the rest is marginal. [...] The centrality of the monarchical institution is stressed all the time by the current head of government, Abdelilah Benkirane, and the youth in Morocco are aware of this reality."

Furthermore, most of the youth in our qualitative work were aware of the limits of their impact on decision-making processes and policies within a context of centralized power. They agree that the influence of youth on these policies remains limited. For a male student activist in the UNEM in Marrakech: “To influence, you should hold power. In Morocco, the parliament doesn’t have power. [...] When the youth express their views, they are a mere force for giving suggestions.”

To fully understand reasons behind the non-participation of the youth in Morocco, it is important to take into account the statements of these young people’s awareness of the limits that seem to be set within the social and political context in which political participation can happen.

3.2 Mistrust in Institutions

According to our survey, the level of confidence in various institutions varies substantially. Only 31 percent of young Moroccans express a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the central government (Table 1). The level of confidence is even lower when it comes to political parties (13 percent) and the parliament (19 percent). Respectively 18, 35 and 27 percent of all respondents voice no confidence at all in the central government, political parties and the parliament. These statistics were confirmed by the qualitative interviews, which stressed the distrust in parties and politicians. For a 19-year-old activist in the Union of Students for Change of the Education System (UECSE): “Politics has become so corrupt that no one believes it anymore; it’s a rotten game where everybody lies and the truth does not exist.”

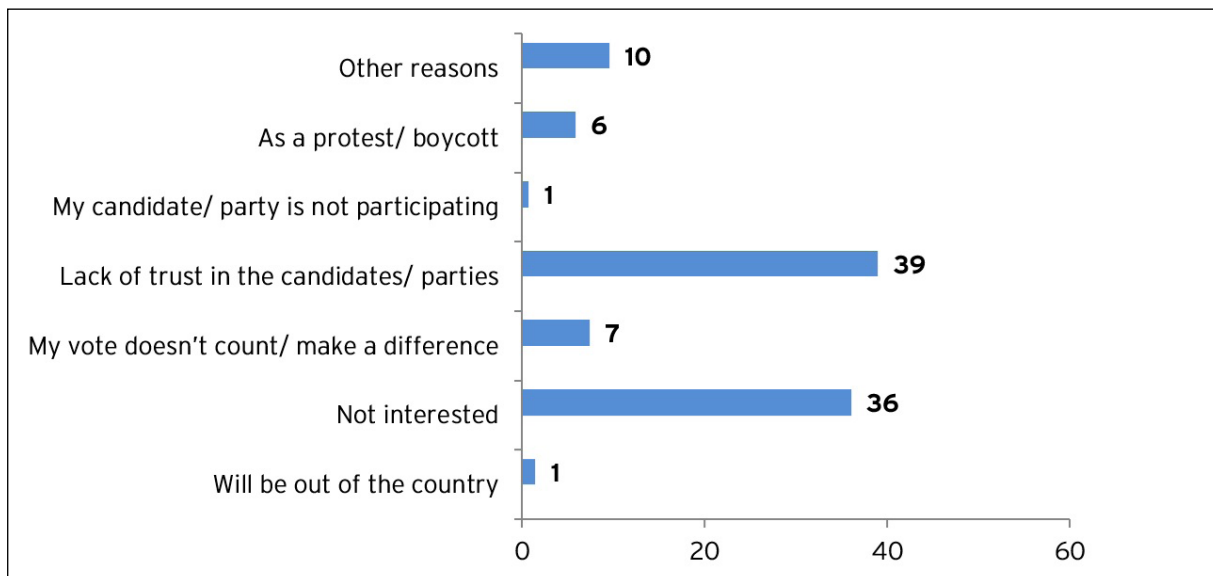
Young people’s confidence in local government (2 percent) is lower than in central government. Confidence in trade unions is at the same level (23 percent). Youth seem to have more faith in civil society organizations (38 percent express a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence) and particularly in religious organizations/mosques, where three in four (75 percent) express a “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence. People’s level of confidence in the printed press, TV and the Internet is fairly modest (at 26, 33 and 23 percent, respectively).

Table 1 | Level of trust in major institutions. Percentage.

	A great deal	Quite a lot	Not very much/a little	None at all
Central government	11	20	51	18
Local government	5	20	55	20
Political parties	1	12	52	35
Parliament	2	17	55	27
Trade unions	2	21	54	23
Civil society	5	33	51	11
Religious organizations, mosques	30	45	22	2
Printed press	2	24	60	14
TV	7	26	55	13
Internet	3	20	64	13

Despite the growing interest in voting, for those who had no intention to vote in the 2016 legislative elections, their decision was mainly motivated by the lack of trust in the political parties and their candidates (39 percent). The second main reason behind abstention is non-interest in elections as a form of participation (36 percent). While many of the engaged youth have a preference for informal means of participation, non-interest in elections is clearly another expression of mistrust in the electoral process, politicians and parties. The third main reason is a belief by some of the youth that their vote does not count or make a difference (7 percent). This feeling of powerlessness reflects the extent to which the youth perceive that the system is closed and does not take seriously the will of the people (Figure 3).

Figure 3 | Main reason for the intention not to vote in the 2016 legislative elections. Percentage.



Abstention is not specific to young people because it is a growing tendency in the electoral behaviour of Moroccans in general. Moroccan elections have been marked by low turnout since 1997, when only 37 percent of registered voters went to the polls. Voter turnout witnessed a relative increase in the 2011 legislative elections when 45.5 percent of registered voters cast their ballots. However, it is important to mention that whilst eligible voters numbered more than twenty million, thirteen million of them were registered on the electoral lists and only six million voters actually cast their ballots. In the 2016 parliamentary elections, 43 percent of registered voters went to the polls. Voter turnout indicates that people's trust in the country's politicians and parties continues to be weak and that political apathy is still predominant. It is also clear that despite the mobilization efforts by parties such as the PJD and the PAM, it still remains difficult to get more Moroccans to the polls.

3.3 Political Exclusion and State Control over Spaces of Participation

The formal political sphere is perceived as lacking credibility and inclusiveness by most young people. Despite the strong discourse of the state about youth inclusion, youth remain largely excluded from the political, social and economic spheres and their demands are largely unsatisfied. Young people between 15 and 29 constitute almost one third of the population in Morocco. The unemployment rate is particularly high among the young and they are

less represented in political bodies than older generations. From this angle, they could be considered as part of the marginalized population. Youth exclusion and the “non-satisfaction” of their demands seem to constitute the seeds for further non-participation.

Despite the measures undertaken by the state toward more youth inclusion, there was a common perception among the informants and those we met in the qualitative fieldwork that young people are largely excluded from the political sphere. They noted that inclusion is very much related to their capacity of influencing decisions and having an impact within their organization, be it an association, a political party or a union. For those who were active within political parties, “membership” does not mean “inclusion”. Many participants felt excluded from decision-making processes within their own political parties. The same feeling was expressed by some of the youth who were active within associations and student unions. Indeed, exclusion is reproduced within different circles and the youth also reproduce the same system of exclusion vis-à-vis each other. The best example that the youth referred to was that of the conflicts among different factions of the National Union of Moroccan Students (*Union nationale des étudiants marocains*, UNEM). Throughout its history, the UNEM has been subject to many divisions. Ideological divergences among its members and organizational conflicts have contributed to its weakening. From a union which served as a space for youth to criticize the regime and to push for greater democracy in the country, the UNEM has become a space for producing violence and reinforcing conflicts among different ideological currents.

State repression and control over spaces of participation could also be considered a reason for non-participation. Reference to state repression was evoked by participants in the qualitative interviews and those who were involved in human rights organizations, student unions, or who were active in the February 20th movement. For many of them, there are no spaces where youth can be active without state control and repression. Student participants gave examples such as the state prohibition of organized activities on university campuses. Fear of repression could also explain the low rates of youth involvement in protest actions. For instance, only 3 percent felt they were part of a protest movement at the time of the survey.

CONCLUSION

Few studies on young people in Morocco try to connect quantitative with qualitative methods. Our study has attempted to fill this gap by basing its analyses on data collected through both methodologies. From these two lenses, we conclude that youth participation through established institutions has been weak. Our data demonstrate weak interest and activism within formal politics but simultaneously confirm that Moroccan youth would like to be more active in a different form of “politics from below”. In this respect, our findings support those of other studies. The formal political sphere has become so discredited over the years that participation through political parties and elections is now being perceived by most young people as meaningless.

Our research shows that young people are not politically apathetic, although only a few are conventional participants. There are high rates of interest in politics and a strong sense of agency. The fact that youth political interest does not translate into action suggests

alienation from the system and disenchantment with the political offer. Non-participation may be interpreted as part of a conscious act to undermine the legitimacy of the system. It might also be seen that this disenchantment with formal politics among the youth may contribute in the long term towards the search of undemocratic and non-peaceful means in order to make their voice heard.

Non-participation is a strong tendency among Moroccan youth. Our informants were, by and large, disengaged from mainstream, electoral and party politics, and from protest actions. While factors such as education, gender, political interest and political knowledge are important for understanding the phenomenon of participation and non-participation, this paper argues that taking account of the context of youth participation matters. In Morocco the question is not about the existence or not of spaces for participation; rather, it is about the degree of influence that individuals can exercise through one venue or another. The paper shows how the institutional setting plays a major role in structuring young people's political participation, particularly in the ways in which it operates as an obstacle to their involvement in formal politics.

In a regime characterized by the centrality of power in the hands of the monarchy/*makhzen*, a controlled partisan scene and discredited political institutions, citizens are aware of the limits of their influence through formal politics. Our quantitative and qualitative data allow us to conclude that politicians and parties are disconnected from the realities and concerns of young people. Moreover, young people's experiences of political exclusion and marginalization create obstacles and disincentives to participation. The young feel excluded from decision-making processes. Even when the youth take part in discussions and debates, they feel they are very often not taken seriously.

REFERENCES

- Barnes, Samuel H. et al. (1979), *Political Action. Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies*, Beverly Hills, Sage
- Bourqia, Rahma, ed. (2000), *Les jeunes et les valeurs religieuses*, Casablanca, Eddif
- Bourqia, Rahma, Mokhtar El Harras and Driss Bensaïd (1995), *Jeunesse estudiantine marocaine. Valeurs et stratégies*, Rabat, Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines
- HCP/Haut Commissariat au Plan (2007), *Quelques caractéristiques des électeurs et des personnes éligibles aux législatives de 2007*, http://www.hcp.ma/Quelques-caracteristiques-des-electeurs-et-des-personnes-eligibles-aux-legislatives-de-2007_a518.html
- Inglehart, Ronald (1997), *Modernization and Postmodernization. Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies*, Princeton, Princeton University Press
- Lust-Okar, Ellen (2008), "Competitive Clientelism in Jordanian Elections", in Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, eds., *Political Participation in the Middle East*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, p. 75-94
- Madani, Mohammed, Driss Maghraoui and Saloua Zerhouni (2012), *The 2011 Moroccan Constitution: A Critical Analysis*, Stockholm, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance/IDEA, <http://www.idea.int/node/278611>
- National Democratic Institute (2012), *Youth Perceptions in Morocco: Political Parties in the Wake of Legislative Elections. Findings from Qualitative Research in Morocco conducted in March and April 2012*, Washington, NDI, <https://www.ndi.org/fr/node/23479>
- Palmer, Monte and Mima S. Nedelcovych (1984), "The Political Behavior of Moroccan Students", in *Journal of Arab Affairs*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring), p. 115-129
- Rachik, Abderrahmane (2014), *Les mouvements de protestation au Maroc. De l'émeute à la manifestation*, Rabat, Forum des Alternatives Maroc/FMAS
- Shehata, Samer (2008), "Inside an Egyptian Parliamentary Campaign", in Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni, eds., *Political Participation in the Middle East*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, p. 95-120
- Stolle, Dietlind, Marc Hooghe and Michele Micheletti (2003), "Politics in the Supermarket: Political Consumerism as a Form of Political Participation", in *International Political Science Review / Revue internationale de science politique*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (July 2005), p. 245-269
- Zerhouni, Saloua (2009), *Jeunes et participation politique au Maroc*, Rabat, Royal Institute of Strategic Affairs/IRES, June, <http://www.ires.ma/download/4567/>
- Zerhouni, Saloua, and Azeddine Akesbi (2016), "Youth Activism in Morocco: Exclusion, Agency and the Search for Inclusion", in *Power2Youth Working Papers*, No. 15 (September), <http://www.iai.it/en/node/6815>



POWER2YOUTH is a research project aimed at offering a critical understanding of youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region through a comprehensive interdisciplinary, multi-level and gender sensitive approach. By combining the economic, political and socio-cultural spheres and a macro (policy/institutional), meso (organizational) and micro (individual) level analysis, POWER2YOUTH explores the root causes and complex dynamics of the processes of youth exclusion and inclusion in the labour market and civic/political life, while investigating the potentially transformative effect of youth collective and individual agency. The project has a cross-national comparative design with the case studies of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey. POWER2YOUTH's participants are 13 research and academic institutions based in the EU member states, Norway, Switzerland and South East Mediterranean (SEM) countries. The project is mainly funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme.

POWER2YOUTH

Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)

Via Angelo Brunetti 9 - I-00186 Roma

Tel. +39-063224360 | Fax +39-063224363

www.power2youth.eu



Istituto Affari Internazionali