



Averroes Policy Forum

Advancing Policy Dialogue



**Leveraging Social Media
for Political Engagement**

Moroccan Youth

Blueprint

Civil Society Series

Averroes Policy Forum Papers discuss timely policy topics impacting the MENA region featuring insights from active civil society leaders. The papers are also used to create an active engagement with decision makers amid more inclusive policy dialogue.

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At glance

Online youth political activism on the rise:

- The succession of Economic boycott online campaigns representing a protest paradigm shift.
- Youth use of online media in new forms beyond echo chambers.
- Reinventing civic engagement thanks to social media:
- Emergence of both Ad hoc and more long standing online civic engagement initiatives.

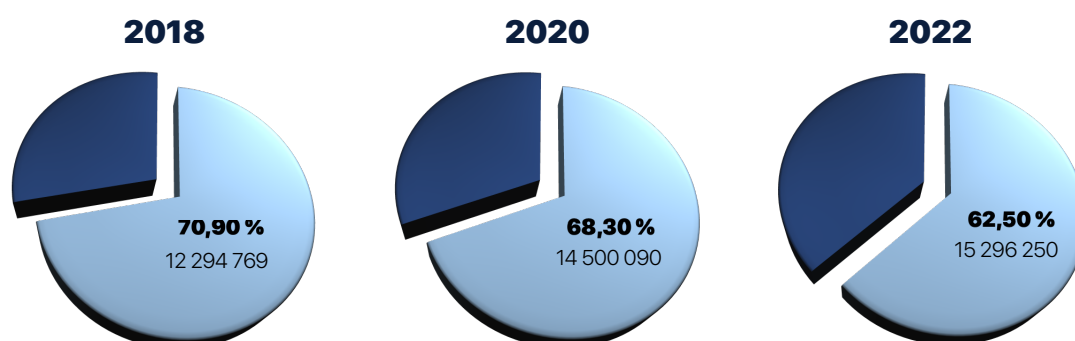
- COVID 19 accelerated the trend.

Civil society lens:

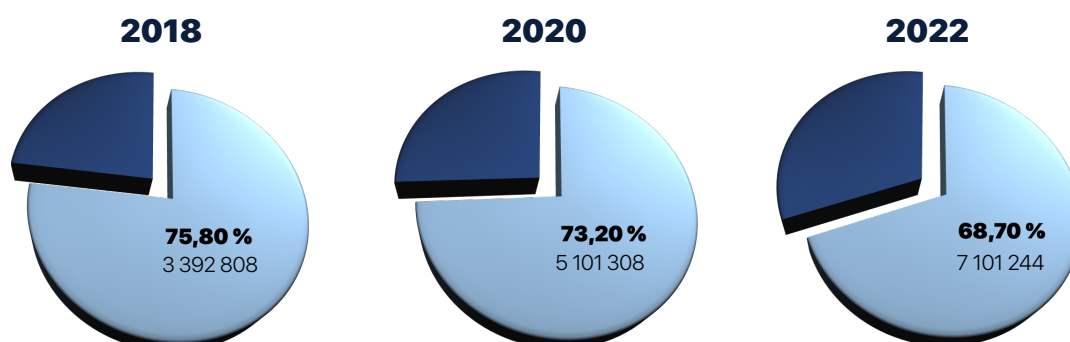
- Featuring Noucharek online platform bridging the gap between CSOs and decision makers.
- Leveraging online tools to counter offline bureaucratic burdens.

In numbers:

Evolution of Facebook use within youth



Evolution of Instagram use within youth



The COVID 19 health crisis coupled with limited public space for free expression accelerated the use of social media as new form of political expression among the youth in Morocco. Moroccan youth are indeed active on different social media platforms. In 2021, the 18-24 years old age category represented 30.6% of social media users in Morocco while the 24- 34 years represented 36.4% of total users as of 2021. The most used platforms among youth in Morocco are respectively Facebook, Instagram and TikTok.

While social media platforms are used for different purposes, the emergence of both online activism and civic engagement is on the rise in Morocco.

The Boycott Social media campaign, a new generation of protests

#7dh_Gazoil is the new hashtag of a social media campaign initiated in Morocco in 2022 to call for a boycott of one of the leading oil distributors in the country with the aim to push the company to reduce its prices. At glance, this new boycott campaign seems to be in line with worldwide popular protests against oil prices picks associated with the war in Ukraine and other geopolitical considerations. However, in Morocco, the major shareholder of one of the targeted companies is also the prime minister of the country which gives the social media campaign additional political gravitas.

This new boycott social media campaign is not an isolated one. In 2018, a larger social media boycott campaign against major companies operating in oil, mineral water and dairy products was initiated lasting for couple of months with different hashtags shared widely. The boycott campaign had direct negative impacts on the stock market share price of the targeted companies as well as an impact on revenues. As such, the dairy product company (Centrale Laitières) allegedly lost 16 million US during the boycott. The widespread nature of the campaign coupled with its potential economic downturns led to its inclusion in the discussions of the house of representatives. The minister of finance back then referred to the campaign with

The use of social media to express political views and engage in civic initiatives is on the rise in Morocco

rather controversial language attacking the social media users who joined the boycott.

The spontaneous nature of the Boycott campaign was questioned as some researchers pointed out that a significant number of social media accounts were created on an ad hoc base just before the start of the campaign with a number of significant ostensibly fake accounts. Nevertheless, this kind of social media mobilization in itself represented a paradigm shift in terms of protests movements shifting them from the physical and on the ground space to the online sphere.

The use of social media as a way to initiate a campaign rather than just as an echo chamber of it also signaled a turning point in term of youth social mobilization in Morocco.

Hirak Rif, a local protest movement going viral

Prior to the Boycott, Hirak Rif activists made a significant use of social media networks to disseminate pictures and videos on the ground protests. At an early stage of the movement, social medias were used mainly to communicate around the nature and grievances of the Hirak. The emergence and widespread use of the hashtag "طحن مو" contributed in later stage to create national and international solidarity with what started initially as a local and geographically bound movement.

While the online activism displayed in both the boycott and the Hirak Rif movement stand on underlying socio- economic grievances, Hirak Rif has the particularity of also drawing from issues of the Amazigh identity and collective memory linked to the history of the Rif region. Broadly, the use of social media to express social, economic, political and cultural demands is now an established reality allowing for a pluralism often denied outside the online space.

Social Media and Youth Civic Engagement

In addition to online political activism, Moroccan youth are also increasingly using social media networks as civic engagement

The Boycott mobilization represented a paradigm shift in terms of protests movements

The massive use of social media enabled Hirak Rif; an initially local protest to gain international traction

platforms. When analyzing different youth-led online civic engagement campaigns, we can clearly distinguish between Ad hoc and more longstanding initiatives.

On the Ad hoc side, Aji Souwet, Moroccan Arabic for come to vote was for instance specifically designed before the 2021 general election with the aim to encourage youth to vote. The social campaign main slogans were inspired from common youth perceptions about politics such as 'they are all the same' and 'is another Morocco possible'. Using common youth language, short videos and heavy online presence allowed the campaign to reach its target audience.

On the more longstanding front, other online civic engagement initiatives are youth led with the objective to consolidate the civic engagement spirit. Noucharik for instance (Arabic for we participate) is an online platform initiated by Sim Sim, a Moroccan based civil society organization in 2018. The aim of the initiative is twofold; a- provide a space for CSOs and citizens more generally to start an advocacy campaign and b- link CSOs and citizens with members of the parliament in participatory approach.

CIVIL SOCIETY LENS

Insights from the interview with Ismail IIsouk, Executive Director of Sim Sim association for Civic Participation, Morocco.

- > Sim Sim started Noucharek (Arabic for we participate) online platform to provide the space for civil society organizations to engage in the Moroccan national decision-making process.
- > Noucharek was designed to facilitate an often-complicated process of initiating petitions and advocacy campaigns.
- > Since its inception, Noucharek platform has received more than thirty advocacy campaigns from which only five campaigns were selected.
- > The selected advocacy campaigns are centered around divers' policy topics ranging from public transportation to family code reforms and alternative punishments in the penal code.
- > The petitions and advocacy campaigns gathered on the Noucharek Platform are used on a timely manner to engage with decision makers during for instance parliament discussions on specific law.
- > At the parliament larger discussions and consultations on the crowdfunding law, Noucharek participated with the introduction of 18 amendments from which 12 were adopted in the final law.
- > One of the major challenges facing the Platform is to keep to its autonomy vis a vis both political parties and the legislative powers.
- > Another major challenge facing the work of Noucharek is the selection of the petitions and advocacy campaigns. While receiving, a large number for call to petitions from CSOs, Noucharek only accept the ones that it deems relevant, applicable and timely.
- > The exclusion of Noucharek from some activities of the Parliament represents an additional challenge when it comes to the work the platform.

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