



# Averroes Policy Forum

Advancing Policy Dialogue



## Moroccan Youth Political Participation

Emergence of New Forms of  
Engagement

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

### Youth Disengagement from Conventional Politics can be explained by:

- The negative perception of political elites which are viewed as self-interested.
- Political elites unresponsive to youth demands.
- Communicational gap between an old entrenched political elites and technological savvy younger generation.

### Formal Endorsement of Youth Engagement:

- Constitutional articles calling for greater youth participation in the public life (article 33).

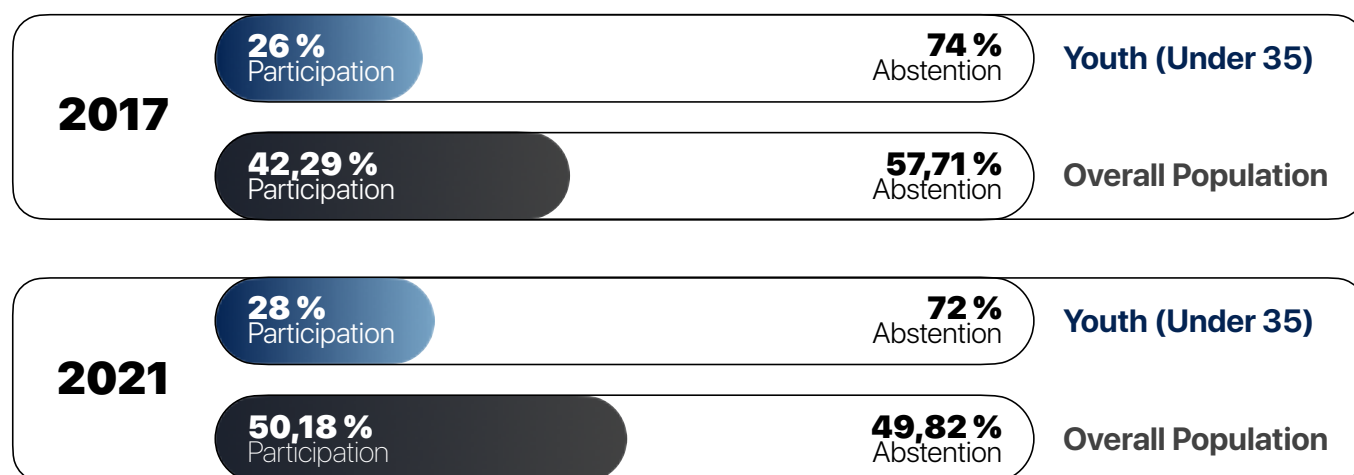
- Creation of a youth consultative body at the national level and youth councils at the regional levels.

### Emergence of New forms of Youth Political Engagement:

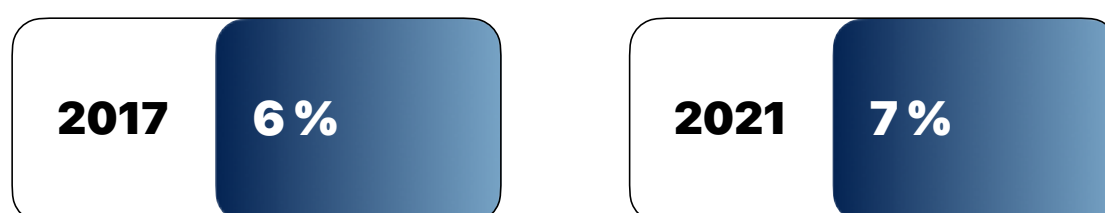
- Massive mobilization of youth within different protests including the 20 February movement.
- Larger and more systematic use of social media as new space for political engagement.

### In numbers:

#### Youth Political Turnout (Estimates)



#### Youth under 35 years Adherence to political parties (Estimates)



**At the official level, the 2011 constitutional reforms represent the new paradigm framing youth civil participation with more room for civic engagement**

## **Youth Participation: Bureaucratic Challenge contrasting with an official endorsement**

In Morocco, the question of youth participation in the public life has been endorsed at the highest state level. In numerous speeches, the King Mohamed VI called for a more integrated vision where the young generation plays an important role in the socio-economic development of the country. Furthermore, the 2011 Moroccan Constitution called for the creation of an "Advisory Council for Youth and Associative Action". This council should in practice be responsible for studying, monitoring and formulating proposals on economic, social and cultural subjects of direct interest to young people and associative action. The council prerogatives also include youth capacity building, promotion of youth participation in the public life amid further inclusion and consolidation of the principles of responsible citizenship. Following several discussions, particularly regarding the composition and mode of operation of the Council, a draft law number 89-15 relating to this Council was finally adopted by the House of Representatives in July 2017.

### **The Consultative Council of Youth and Associative Action: A formal Institutional Endorsement**

Article 33 of the 2011 Moroccan constitution holds public powers responsible for taking 'all the appropriate measures to stimulate and generalize the participation of youth in the social, economic, cultural and political life of the country'. The article also foresees the establishment of the Consultative Council of Youth and Associative Action (Conseil Consultatif de la Jeunesse et de l'Action Associative).

The Consultative Council of Youth and Associative Action is supposed to participate in the public debate on youth related public policies.

At the regional level, the consultative council coordinates with local youth councils to channel the voice of youth and civil society actors in the social, economic, cultural and political development of the country.

The 2011 constitutional reforms represent the new paradigm framing civil participation with more room for civic engagement. Over the past seven years, initiatives have been implemented on the ground to deploy those constitutional reforms. As such, government has developed an advanced regulatory framework, created new tools for citizens to engage in decision-making; we can mention handbooks, reference guides and procedures, digital platforms like *chikaya.ma* in addition to youth consultative regional councils. A new hotline for citizen grievances for example has already received 15,000 calls; while a digital platform for submitting petitions, a right guaranteed by the 2011 constitutional reform will be launched soon.

Nevertheless, more work is still needed to accommodate for the constitutional orientations toward greater civic engagement; authorities for example have disregarded a petition on environmental concerns and refused in some instances to meet with CSOs indicating that old-entrenched mentalities may hamper implementation.

## **From Disengagement to new emerging forms of political participation**

In Morocco, youth are often depicted as politically inactive with a rather consistent trend of weak political participation and limited membership in political parties and unions. Low electoral turnout rates are likewise observed among Moroccan youth. Moroccan youth often explain their disengagement from formal political participation by their negative perception of political elites which are viewed as self-interested, lacking legitimacy, and indifferent to their demands as well as indifferent to the country's development.

Yet despite what seems to be as a complete absence from formal political engagement, new forms of youth civic and political engagement are emerging challenging the very notion of youth political apathy. Empirical findings show that younger generations continue to be interested in and informed about politics. Indeed, evidence suggests youth support for a different type of politics that is more participative and direct in nature. Indeed, young people are now more likely than the country's population to participate in protests which was obvious in the 20 February movement for instance. Youth has also shown a capacity to leverage social media and the online space to express their political engagement.

**More work is still needed to accommodate for the constitutional orientations toward greater civic engagement**

**Evidence suggests youth support for a different type of politics that is more participative and direct in nature**

### **The 20 February Movement: A Moroccan Youth Version of the Arab Spring**

The “20th February” movement in Morocco echoed the larger Arab spring protest movements of 2011. Through weekly protests in the streets, the movement asked for significant institutional reforms including reforming the Monarchy itself.

The movement demands were mainly articulated around:

- A. A democratic constitution expressing popular sovereignty.
- B. The dissolution of the parliament, the dismissal of the government at that time and the establishment of a transitional administration.
- C. An independent judiciary under a strict separation of powers;
- D. The trial of all individuals involved in the mismanagement and the squandering of public funds;
- E. The Amnesty of all political prisoners including prisoners of opinion and the trial of all those responsible for arbitrary detention and torture.
- F. A better quality and access to social welfare.

Following the massive protests held during the February 20th, 2011, King Mohammed VI addressed the nation on March 9th, promising “a comprehensive constitutional review”. Moreover, the King announced the appointment of a “Constitutional Reform Advisory Commission”.

The February 20 Movement was mainly composed of youth who were able to leverage social media to mobilize and campaign for its protest’s days. The capacity to use social media during the early days of the 20 February movement and in later social protests reveals to be crucial in a country where the media apparatus is largely state controlled.

### **Shadow Youth Government: Experimenting Political Life**

Benefiting from the impetus given to youth participation by the new constitution, the Moroccan Youth Forum established in 2012 the “parallel youth government”: a national shadow government in which every constitutional minister has its young “shadow”/counterpart.

With this youth government, the Moroccan Youth Forum aimed to consolidate the voice of young people in national politics and at the same time act as an instrument for training “politicians of tomorrow”. The members of the youth government, mainly youth leaders and students, evaluated public policies developed by the national government and prepared reports on issues on the political agenda. The youth government is now in its second mandate.

## **“Aji Souwet”: An Innovative Youth call for Balloting**

Around 20 young Moroccans aged 18 to 25 initiated “Aji Souwet, Moroccan Arabic for come to vote; a campaign designed to encourage Moroccan youth to vote in the national legislative elections of 2021. The campaign targeted youth via social media with short videos and divers’ posts. The campaign simple message was articulated around urging youth to vote instead of staying in the passive role of complaining and not staying as spectators.

**The capacity to use social media during the early days of the 20 February movement and in later social protests reveals to be crucial in a country where the media apparatus is still largely state controlled**

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