



## Political and civic participation of young people in North Africa : behaviours, discourses and opinions.

Participación política y cívica de los jóvenes en África del Norte: prácticas, discursos y opiniones.

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### Abstract

This text introduces the special issue that examines the opinions and political behaviour of young people in the three Maghreb countries - Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco - over the last ten years, after the so-called "Arab Spring". The assumption is that, although young North Africans do not form a homogeneous category and may even defend antagonistic outlooks on society, there are underlying trends that structure this emerging generation. The contributions of this special issue are articulated around three main topics: the construction and the representations of Youth as a social and political category; the political attitudes of young people and their perception of their respective societies in general and of political actors in particular; and finally, on the conflict between, on the one hand, the recognition of their rights and spaces for civic participation and, on the other, their electoral disaffection as reflected by opinion surveys and official data. In other words, this special issue discusses the complexity of the rise of a new generation through their narratives and their practices.

**Key words:** youth/ Maghreb/ elections/ mobilizations/ attitudes/ social change.

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## Resumen

En este texto se presenta el número monográfico que se centra en el análisis de las opiniones y comportamientos políticos de los jóvenes de los tres países del Magreb - Argelia, Túnez y Marruecos – en los diez últimos años, esto es, dentro del contexto marcado por la contestación conocida como “Primavera árabe”. Las distintas contribuciones parten de la premisa según la cual, si bien los jóvenes norteafricanos no forman una categoría homogénea, y pueden incluso defender visiones normativas antagónicas de la sociedad, lo cierto es que se pueden identificar grandes tendencias que marcan esta generación en formación. Los grandes ejes que vertebran las distintas contribuciones de este número monográfico son los siguientes: la construcción y representaciones de la juventud como categoría social y política; las actitudes políticas de los jóvenes y la percepción que tienen de sus respectivas sociedades en general y de los actores políticos en particular ; y por último, el contraste entre de una parte, el reconocimiento de derechos y espacios para la participación cívica de los jóvenes y, de otra, la desafección electoral que evidencian las encuestas de opinión y los datos oficiales. En suma, se trata de reflexionar sobre la compleja emergencia de una nueva generación a través de sus discursos y prácticas.

**Palabras clave:** jóvenes/ Magreb/ elecciones/ movilizaciones/ actitudes/ cambio social.

## Introduction

This dossier addresses some aspects of the social, professional, and political condition of young people in three North African countries—Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia—in the years after the ‘Arab Spring’, thus complementing a previous dossier on the prominence of young people in protest movements (Desrues, 2015). In the contributions gathered in this issue, the analysis focuses on the behaviour and opinions of young people in these countries with respect to their social, associative, and political participation after the protests of 2011. It also includes related topics such as how young people view the different systems of government and their civil and political rights. These are crucial questions for understanding the serious crisis of representation and political and social mediation that the three political regimes of the region are going through, despite the constitutional reforms, institutional adjustments, and electoral processes that have taken place over the last few years. In other words, the different articles attempt to provide some understanding of the social, professional, and political condition of young people in the different political systems. In Morocco, an executive monarchy governs via a series of subordinate democratic bodies in which different political parties participate with the mission of mediating and executing royal directives (Desrues, 2018a). In Algeria, there has been, to date, a presidential and praetorian republic in which corporatist organisations accompany and mediate the different sectors of society (Thieux, 2018; Serres, 2019). Finally, in Tunisia, a process of democratic consolidation is underway, under a presidential republic in which political and social pluralism is reflected in the multiparty system (Chouikha and Gobe, 2015) and in the rise of the network of associations (Desrues, 2019).

In this introductory article, we will first analyse the discourse that circulates around young Maghrebis, which oscillates between their recognition as agents and drivers of development and modernisation, and their rejection as a social and political problem that creates concern and threatens the stability of the different regimes. Second, we present the place that young people occupy in the public policies of the different governments and the recent interest in the development of policies directed towards young people. Third, we analyse how the social condition of young people has evolved, as well as the tensions that emerge during the transition towards adulthood and the consequent social recognition. In this regard, the existing political rights in each country reflect, in some way, the normative and institutional recognition that young people are granted, while their limited participation in formal and institutional politics (political

parties, elections) is an indication of how they evaluate such social recognition in general, and the public authorities in particular. Finally, throughout this introduction we will discuss and complement the various contributions that are presented in the dossier.

During the last eight years, young people in the Maghreb have become a specific object of research in the social sciences. This recent development has often been driven by national, supranational, and international organisations, both public and private, that co-operate with the countries of the region and prompt, advise, and fund some of the actions aimed at this age group. When viewed together, this important and at the same time disparate work leaves a clear impression: that the definition of young people, that is, their delimitation as an age group, is based primarily on them being seen as a public problem.

This dossier seeks to contribute to the existing debates on this question and the elements that legitimate this type of approach. To do so, it presents some of the results of the research projects that have been promoted by the IESA-CSIC (Instituto de Estudios Sociales Avanzados del Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas; Institute for Advanced Social Studies of the Spanish National Research Council) with funding from the Spanish government, as well as the contribution of other colleagues that have joined the discussion through different workshops<sup>1</sup>.

### **From development policies to the need to create policies for young people**

When the three countries became independent between 1956 and 1962, their respective population pyramids showed that they were predominantly 'young' countries. Over the years, the policies targeting young people in Tunisia, Morocco, and Algeria have focused fundamentally on education, employability, sports, and outdoor activities, culture, and family (Duchac and Camilieri, 1974; Melitti et al., 2008; Benghabrit Remaoun and Elaidi, 2012; Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag, 2007). These policies were framed within the predominant developmental ideology of that period, in which the state aspired to consolidate its hegemony through the regulation of most areas of society.

In this regard, Algeria was paradigmatic. After Houari Boumedién's coup d'état in 1965, the UNJA (National Union of the Youth of Algeria) was created, which joined the Youth of the National Liberation Front to represent monopolistically the young people of the new independent state, while the student movement close to the opposition Communist party, the National Union of Algerian Students (UNEA), was dissolved in 1971. Similarly, and following the logic of the Algerian

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<sup>1</sup> This dossier presents some results of two research projects that have received financial support respectively from the Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness of Spain for the activities of the project "Public problems and activism in the Maghreb. The social and political participation of young people, in addition to the local and transnational dimensions" [grant number CSO2014-52998-C3-2-P], and by the Ministry of Science, innovation and universities, the Spanish National Research Agency and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) for the project "Crisis and Political Representation in North Africa: Institutional arrangements and challenges" [Grant number CSO2017-84949-C3-2-P]. Among the different workshops organised by the Institute for Advanced Social Studies of the Spanish National Research Council (IESA-CSIC), we should highlight the one organised in Rabat in 2017, which involved the collaboration of the Centre Jacques Berque pour les Études en Sciences Humaines et Sociales.

case, the mass political movements in Tunisia and Morocco have focused on the recruitment and indoctrination of children and adolescents through partisan organisations and civil society organisations, such as the scouts, while fighting some of the student organisations with greater social support when they have disagreed with official policy. We refer to the case of the General Union of Tunisian Students (UGET) and the National Union of Moroccan Students (UNEM), both opposed to the regimes of Bourguiba (1956–1987) and Hassan II (1962–1999), respectively, and that were dominated by revolutionary tendencies inspired by third-worldist or pan-Arabist movements (El Ayadi, 1999).

Between the 1980s and 1990s, student organisations were generally weakened, while the focus on separation and segmentation of youth policies led by the public authorities persisted. However, the failure regarding the socio-professional insertion of young people, in particular young graduates, began to concern the Maghrebi leaders. In this regard, the early school leaving of working-class and rural youth, especially girls, and the possible risk behaviours that arise from a lack of things to do, rising graduate unemployment, and emigration to the big cities and abroad became the main concerns for these regimes. At the same time, a new kind of political protest emerged, marked by the rise of Islamism, after the repression of the left-wing movements during the 1960s and 1970s. As a result, there emerged some studies that analysed social change and young people's values (Zghal, 1984) and, in particular, the increase of religiosity of this age group (Bourquia et al., 1995; Bourquia et al., 2000; Merzouk, 1997) and their participation in new areas of socialisation, as represented by associations (Bennani-Chraïbi, 1994)<sup>2</sup>. There is thus a proliferation of discourses about young people, especially in official circles.

In Tunisia, for example, the declaration on 7 November 1987, which inaugurated the coming to power of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali (1987–2011), already mentioned young people as a priority. Some measures, like the creation of a High Council for Youth, were taken, although the priority remained schooling during the 'first cycle' (12 to 14 years) of secondary school and the segmentation of the public policies that targeted young people among the various ministries. Finally, the National Youth Observatory (ONJ) periodically carried out a national survey of young people and organised training sessions (Mahfoud-Draoui, 2008).

In Morocco, King Hassan II created in 1990 the National Council of Youth and the Future (CNJA) with the aim of proposing solutions to the problem of the professional integration of young people. Nevertheless, the activities of the CNJA were focused on conducting surveys and reports that were to have no impact on the conditions of young people. Later, in 2001, the Moroccan Ministry of Youth and Sports carried out a wide-ranging national survey on young people which was to serve as the basis for the development of a New National Youth Policy (NPNJ). However, its greatest achievement was the setting up of the 'holidays for all' programme aimed at youth associations. In 2003, after the terrorist attacks in Casablanca, perpetrated by a group of young people from the Sidi Moumen district, a renewed interest in the youth issue arose, but without much result, despite the apparent desire to promote youth centres and the network of associations through the launch in 2005 of the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) (Berriane, 2013). Furthermore, the national youth policy was never completed due to the turnover of ministers, who re-examined and modified it every time they were appointed. In Morocco, like in Tunisia, graduate unemployment became a structural problem, producing demonstrations against growing job insecurity and a lack of prospects (Badimon Emperador, 2007). One of the demands

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<sup>2</sup> Apart from the above-mentioned studies, there are other studies of a sociology of Maghrebi youth as a driver and agent of social change subjected to great difficulties in terms of integration and social and professional promotion emerged during the first 10 years of the 21st century (Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag, 2007; Zerhouni, 2009; Mahfoud-Draoui and Melitti, 2006; Hegasy, 2007; Badimon Emperador, 2007; Desrues and Moreno Nieto, 2009; Herrera and Bayat, 2010).

that stood out was that of the right to access a public job, reminiscent of the utopian promise of the days after independence, which has become the symbol of the failure of successive governments to achieve social and professional insertion for young people.

The situation of Algerian youth is not so different from that of its neighbours, although it was marked mainly by the successive waves of violence that affected the country. The repression of the October 1988 riots (Le Saout and Rollinde, 1999; Djebaili, 1996), the war between security forces and armed Islamist militias during the 1990s (Martinez, 1998), and the Black Spring of Kabylie in 2001 (Tilmatine and Desrués, 2017) especially targeted young Algerians. Probably as a consequence of the indiscriminate violence meted out during these years, youth policies in Algeria, as in Tunisia and Morocco, focused on less political issues, such as education, professional training, employment, sport, and leisure activities. And like in its neighbouring countries, the apparent political will towards young people fell, again and again, on deaf ears. This was reflected in the national youth conference, organised in 2007, which assembled the Algerian Presidency and the regional governors and concluded with a series of good intentions in line with the demands of the supranational organisations, but which failed to implement any specific policy (Benghabrit Remaoun and Elaidi, 2012).

However, it is necessary to look beyond the national policies and to pay attention to the international dimension of the policies and discourses regarding young people. The external dimension is crucial for states like Tunisia and Morocco, which tend to externalise the advising and financing of part of their public policies, depending on their level of foreign debt and dependence. We should also mention the introduction of young people's rights on the agenda of the various organisations of the United Nations (UN) since 1989 and the initiatives that emerged out of the Barcelona Process for the establishment of an area of peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean, promoted by 22 countries of the European Union and North Africa and the Middle East in 1995 (Melliti et al., 2008; Mahfoud-Draoui and Melliti, 2006). In this regard, Abla Rouag-Djenidi (University of Constantine) presented a survey on the participation of children and adolescents, which was conducted in 2009 and promoted by UNICEF. She highlighted that both the recognition of citizen's rights and the freedom of expression of Algerian adolescents are constantly limited by the authoritarian and paternalistic culture that persists in the main institutions of socialisation, namely the family, schools, and the public authorities. The adults consulted considered that children and adolescents should above all be submissive and obedient towards them, rather than seeing themselves as responsible and guarantors of their rights. The only exception to this social and generational verticality is the relationship that adolescents have with their peers, young people in their friendship group or milieu, which are more horizontal and freer. In Tunisia, there are also initiatives to encourage the participatory socialisation of children and adolescents, reflected by the creation of the 'Children's Parliament' in 2002.

Although there is a certain recognition in the three countries of the Maghreb of the need to encourage the participation of young people, it is paradoxical that this is encouraged and promoted in authoritarian contexts, in which the political participation of adults is often limited and repressed. In Morocco, as well as the initiatives that arose under the umbrella of the INDH

from 2005 onwards, other cosmetic initiatives like the election of the first municipal youth council emerged, again within the French programme of cooperation with non-governmental organisations in 2010. Furthermore, many of the initiatives to promote the participation of young people during the 2000s were often localised, sectorial, of limited time, and without real impact on most young people. The main problem thus lies in the inability of the public authorities to ensure that such initiatives are taken advantage of by the people they are supposed to reach.

However, according to the various reports carried out for the regional programme EuroMed Youth, which emerged from the Barcelona Process and which published these reports in 2009, none of the three countries have implemented real youth policies, because, as the report mentioned, 'for the governments of the Maghreb region, these policies are still primarily linked to policies of employment, education, culture, sports, and outdoor activities.' Thus, irrespective of the initiatives taken by the successive governments during recent decades, one can observe a disparity between the discourse of the political leaders and their practices, reflected in the results of the public policies implemented and their impact on young people in the three countries. It is contradictory that these regimes fully recognise the rights of young people when they are the first to violate them through persisting authoritarianism (Parejo Fernández, 2010; Szmolka, 2017). Even in the case of the young king of Morocco, Mohammed VI, who acceded to the throne at only 35 years of age in 1999 and who called for the renewal of the political class through the rejuvenation of its members, the success has been limited. Among the most outstanding measures of the period of change of monarch are the reform of the law related to political parties in 2006, which encourages the incorporation of young people in the directing bodies of political parties, and the creation of the National Institute of Youth and Democracy (INJD), also in 2006, with the aim of promoting the socialisation of young members of political parties in the values of 'a new democratic culture'. Nevertheless, in the 2007 elections, only 37% of registered voters actually cast their vote, while the participation of young people in the election was under 20%.

Having said that, a reading of the national reports of EuroMed Youth makes clear the official positions maintained by these international organisations, which produce a legitimising discourse on a supranational level and often show themselves to be obliging to the different governments of the region. In this regard, the different reports highlight the governments' interest in addressing policies of access to housing, employment, leisure activities, health, and training, based on the accounts of governmental sources (Floris, 2009a and b; Rarrbo, 2009). Nevertheless, although they omit the electoral disaffection of young people, they constantly point out, as Floris (2009a) mentions—in a premonitory way in the case of Tunisia—that 'this youth, profoundly different from the generation that preceded it, is marked by expectations and aspirations for change that deserve to be recognized. To fail to do so could create the risk of having a generation of passive and outraged consumers or instead of a generation of conscientious actors.'

This diagnosis calls into question the situation of political blindness that seems to predominate in the discourses collected in the reports, but which we find once again in the case of Tunisia. This wake-up call seems to have been heard by the Tunisian presidency, which took the initiative to propose to the United Nations the proclamation of 2010 as the 'International Year of Youth', under the slogan: 'Dialogue and mutual understanding'. On 18 December 2009, the United Nations unanimously adopted the initiative of the President of the Republic of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, born in 1936, whose vision received unanimous praise in the Tunisian media. One year later, on 17 December 2010, a young twenty-seven-year-old street vendor, Tarek el-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in the small city of Sidi Bouzid, in the centre of the country, provoking a wave of protests that resulted in the fall of the dictator Ben Ali on 14 January 2011 and that extended to the rest of the region, earning the name, 'Arab Spring'.

### **Maghrebi youth: An understanding based on the difficulties of social and professional insertion**

In general, young people leave adolescence through a variety of experiences that contribute to increasing their autonomy with respect to obligations imposed by the family and state institutions. These experiences, which are often discontinuous and reversible, enable young people to get to know themselves and to develop their own identity and future perspectives, often leading to a reluctance to make lasting commitments. The capacity, freedom, and opportunities to experiment obviously vary in each individual depending on multiple factors: personality, aspirations, family environment, academic results, job opportunities, social and economic condition, and place of residence (Bourdieu, 2008). Furthermore, the condition of young people is also marked by the difficulties people of a certain age find when it comes to making a commitment and keeping to that commitment over the years and, in short, becoming and being perceived by those around them as adults. Outlining these individual, contextual, and structural variables enables us to keep in sight the capacity of individuals to become agents of their own destiny, the heterogeneity of young people's trajectories, and the importance of the individual's social status. Therefore, when we refer to young people, we are not starting from a definition rooted in biological age, but rather from a definition that takes into account the different predominant conditions and situations within a sector of the population that is characterised by the transitory nature of its passage from adolescence to adulthood. Additionally, we should not forget that each society organises the life stages of individuals according to norms, thus influencing the ways in which people are perceived, considered, and treated as 'young people'. This collection of norms, perceptions, and treatments tends, in turn, to become increasingly part of the existing legislation, as a consequence of the growing process of state rationalisation that affects and delimits the areas of people's lives. One of the first and main areas is that of the preestablished ages for compulsory education and the legal working age.

For example, schooling is compulsory from an early age, from 3 to 7 years until 14 to 16 years. The end of compulsory schooling usually, in turn, coincides with the age at which it is legal to enter the labour market. While it is well known that in rural areas and in many disadvantaged urban areas young people start working earlier, this age (14 or 16 years) is considered to be the time when young people, in particular, the girls, begin to leave adolescence and transition towards adulthood. The end of the last phase of schooling also marks the beginning of a stage in which parental transmission loses influence due to the increasing impact of two institutions of socialisation on individuals: that which stems from educational institutions, which results in growing socialisation among peers, and, in recent years, that which arises from web 2.0 and social networks. As a result, friendships and young people of the same age become increasingly important in the socialisation of individuals in this phase of leaving adolescence (Melliti, 2015; Hadibi, 2014). During this stage in which different types of autonomy are acquired, there usually arise tensions that increase and accumulate depending on the degree of difficulty involved in achieving and stabilising this autonomy. For several decades, this phase has tended to become increasingly long due to the dual phenomena of the need for young people to undertake training and obtain quality jobs. The reality is often job insecurity as well as the uncertainty about the future that arises from this situation. This combination of adverse factors ends up disturbing the

stabilisation of young people's emotional lives and aspirations of life with a partner and access to housing, as well as their plans to start a family. In the last three decades, the relevance of this combination of circumstances has meant that this sector of the population has ended up being defined fundamentally by criteria of exclusion and precaria. (Bono, 2015; Herrera, 2017). We also need to add two further criteria based on the perception that adults have of the attitude of young people. On the one hand, if young people show themselves to be passive, they are called the 'apathetic generation', indifferent or even anaemic, or what in recent years has been known as the NEET phenomenon (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). On the other hand, if they decide to rebel and publicly protest their situation, they are considered—depending on their characteristics, causes, demands, and the ways in which they demonstrate—either as drivers of positive change or a social and national threat. Finally, and moving beyond this dualistic perception, there is a third perspective, defended by other scholars who see the daily appropriation of the street and public spaces by young people, be they unemployed, street vendors, hustlers, and so forth, as an act of resistance against the disdain they feel they receive from the various figures that embody authority in society: family, school, police, and the other official institutions of socialisation (Bayat, 2010).

In the countries of the Maghreb, throughout the last two decades, access to primary education has become widespread, and there has been a progressive tendency to complete this stage of education and to start secondary school in Algeria and Tunisia— from 64,7% and 74,6% in 2000 to 99.9% and 92% in 2011 respectively—and in Morocco, although to a lesser extent, at only 38,5% in 2000 and 66.4% in 2011 (School enrollment, secondary, % gross). This has, in turn, contributed to an increase in enrolment in higher education, that has risen from 13,6% in 2000 to 31% in 2011 in Algeria, 19,2% to 34.6% in Tunisia and from 10% to 16,2% in Morocco (School enrollment, tertiary, % gross)<sup>3</sup>. This generalisation of secondary education and the growing access to higher education has, however, led to students and their families having greater expectations with regard to employment<sup>4</sup>, to greater competition between men and women, to a massification and deterioration of public higher education, while the number of private educational institutions has increased, implying additional costs for families, and, finally, to a delay in letting go of student status among young people between 18 and 24. In this way, both in the Maghreb and in the rest of the world, the condition of young people is increasingly becoming that of a student or an unemployed graduate.

The increase in access to secondary and higher education has also turned the educational sector into one of the main budget items and the main governmental employer. It has also led to education being pursued as a means of social ascension and to the current discrepancy between young people's demand for work and the prospects that the labour market offers. The combined result of these three trends is the appearance of a feeling of frustration shared by educational personnel, parents, and students, which is expressed in different ways. In the case of young

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<sup>3</sup> Data source: The World Bank Data, available in <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR?end=2017&locations=MA-TN-DZ&start=1971> [Accessed on 12 February 2019].

<sup>4</sup> Several surveys carried out in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia show that most working young people are either unsatisfied with their job or are not working in a sector related to their training. For Algeria, see the CREAD report on the SAHWA project. CREAD : 'Rapport principal de l'enquête algérienne sur la jeunesse, Centre de Recherche en Economie Appliquée pour le Développement', 27 March 2017, available in <http://www.sahwa.eu/OUTPUTS/Other-publications/Rapport-principal-de-l-enquete-algerienne-sur-la-jeunesse> [Accessed on 1 December 2018] doi.org/10.24241/swsdr.2017. Algeria. For Morocco, see EL GHOUARI, Tilila : 'Enquête ReKroute.com: Les jeunes déçus par leur premier job', *L'Économiste*, 14 Septembre 2018, available in <https://www.leconomiste.com/article/1033563-enquete-rekrute-com-les-jeunes-decus-par-leur-premier-job> [Accessed on 1 December 2018]. For Tunisia, see 'Tunisie: 18% des jeunes âgés entre 19 et 25 ans n'ont aucune activité éducative ou professionnelle', *Huffpost Maghreb*, 30 April 2014, [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2014/04/29/tunisie-jeunes-oisifs\\_n\\_5233603.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=mg-chomage-jeunes-tunisie](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2014/04/29/tunisie-jeunes-oisifs_n_5233603.html?utm_hp_ref=mg-chomage-jeunes-tunisie) [Accessed on 10 July 2018].



unemployed graduates, what stands out is their capacity to form a lasting protest group that has persisted in its demands for two decades (Badimon Emperador, 2007; Antonakis-Nashif, 2016; Hadj-Moussa, 2017). Further, the symbolic reach of their protests, which occur more and more frequently and are directed towards gaining work in the public sector, remind us that those affected increasingly accuse the state of being responsible for the situation.

Available statistics indicate that, in general, adulthood begins after 24 years, although it accelerates and peaks at around 35 years, the age at which the vast majority of Maghrebi men have work, are looking for work, are married, or have at least one child. Therefore, and in accordance with these findings, when we speak of young people, we are referring to the age group of 18 to 35 years which, defined according to criteria of social, professional, and civil recognition and status, represents close to 30% of the population of the countries of the Maghreb. Indeed, youth is a period of transition that is more or less long and more or less discontinuous, linear, and predictable depending on the individual and its social position. As it aims to define the tendencies affecting most young people, this presentation has a tendency to standardize the youth and set aside young people from wealthy and upper-middle classes, on the one hand, and workers, employers, or employees that are satisfied with their situation, notwithstanding their social origin, on the other.

Finally, the notion of youth is not just a compendium of a series of attitudes, opinions, and actions, but also of different discourses, such as the common sense discourse of ordinary citizens, that of specialists (psychologists, sociologists, educators, and so forth), and that of the legislators that must produce norms that regulate and contribute to defining and organising the category of 'young people'.

### **The limits of the institutional recognition of young people as political actors: Electoral abstention**

In any country, it can be considered that legislation translates the perception that the political elites have of the role that society attributes to young people in different areas of life. In this regard, the legal recognition of the right to political participation is an indicator that provides us with an understanding of the representation that each society has of young people. We are referring to those recognitions that grant the political rights to vote or be elected, the economic rights to entering the labour market, the civic rights that regulate the possibility to found or join an association or co-operative, and, finally, the civil rights that delimit affective and family autonomy via the right to marry.

#### *The constitutional recognition of young people as a social category: Between arbitrariness, declarations of intent and imitation*

The three constitutions written or revised since 2011 are a good indicator of the place that Maghrebi societies reserve for their young people. Apart from the fact that, in the official calendar of the recent Tunisian democracy, 14 January has become 'Revolution and Youth Day', the new

Tunisian constitution produced by the Constituent Assembly and adopted in 2014 dedicated article 8 to young people as a central and patriotic actor in the future of the country:

*Youth are an active force in building the nation. The state seeks to provide the necessary conditions for developing the capacities of youth and realising their potential, supports them to assume responsibility, and strives to extend and generalise their participation in social, economic, cultural, and political development.*

In Morocco, the constitutional reform of 2011, provoked by the protests of the 20 February Movement, and whose road map was outlined by King Mohammed VI in his speech on 9 March 2011, shows in detail the growing interest towards young people. Led by a group of experts designated by the monarch, and after consultation with the various political forces and the network of associations, the recent Constitution envisaged in article 33 that:

*It is incumbent on the public powers to take all the appropriate measures with a view to:*

- stimulate and make general the participation of youth in the social, economic, cultural and political development of the country;*
- aid the young to establish themselves in [an] active and associative life and to give assistance to them in the difficulty of scholarly, social or professional adaptation;*
- facilitate the access of the young to culture, to science, to technology, to art, to sports and to leisure, all in creation of propitious conditions for the full deployment of their creative and innovative potential in all these domains;*

*A consultative Council of Youth and of Associative Action is created to this effect.*

Algeria was also unable to avoid revising its constitution and consequently making references to young people. While it did so with some delay compared to its neighbouring countries, the constitutional revision of 6 March 2016 is the most extensive in its references to youth. The preamble establishes that:

*The youth shall be at the heart of national commitment to overcoming the economic, social and cultural challenges, and will remain supporting future generations, the main beneficiary of this commitment.*

And article 37 continues:

*The youth are a lively force in building the homeland. The State shall ensure the provision of all requirements needed for developing and enhancing the youth capacities.*

While articles 200 and 201 stipulate that:

*A Supreme Youth Council shall be established, as a consultative body under the President of the Republic.*

*The Council shall consist of youth representatives, and representatives from the government and the public institutions in charge of youth affairs.*

*(Art. 200)*

*The Supreme Youth Council shall present opinions and recommendations regarding the issues related to youth needs and prosperity in the economic, social, and cultural and sports fields.*

*The Council shall contribute to the promotion of national values, national conscience, civil awareness, and social solidarity within the youth circles.*

*(Art. 201)*

The case of Algeria corroborates the phenomenon of legal imitation in the Maghreb, since it seems to combine the contents of the constitutions of Tunisia and Morocco, an imitation that is reflected in other legal reforms, like that of the handling of the Amazighs' demands (Le Saout, 2017).

It should be said that the three North African countries have taken note of the relevance of the 'youth' category, albeit symbolically and under the pressure of historic events. The three countries thus join others that, for several decades, have shown a concern about the participation of young people in decision-making processes, the acquisition of a political culture, and their political and civic participation in elections and civil society organisations.

*The exercise of political rights and the voting age: From the normative framework of political participation to electoral abstention.*

With these constitutional innovations, the issue of the integration of young people as political and socio-economic actors then arises. And this occurs in contexts in which young people have been socialised, for the most part, under authoritarian regimes; in which the government is not prepared to handle their participation; in which associations and community initiatives find it difficult to flourish freely and autonomously; and in which young people often lack the material conditions required to be able to fulfil their constitutional role.

In the Maghreb, as in other regions of the world, political participation is above all measured in terms of electoral participation. The legal age to be able to participate in political life, that is, to be able to vote, is 18, while the legal age for being elected to parliament is 23.

Furthermore, the quotas for young people in the form of reserved seats in the lower house of the Moroccan parliament since 2011 establish 40 as the age limit, while the youth quotas in Tunisia, adopted in 2014 after the regime change, and which are applied to the electoral lists, establish the maximum age at 35. In addition, Tunisia stipulates 35 as the minimum age for standing at the presidential elections. With regard to participation in associations, the legal age for being a founding member of an association is 18 in Algeria and Morocco and 16 in Tunisia. We can thus see a gap between the legal ages for voting or founding an association and those required to be a political representative. It appears that legislators consider that the category of 'young person' starts between the ages of 16 and 18, while political maturity is seen to begin at 23 —the ages for access to political representation—and to peak at between 35 and 40. In reality, these last ages as the maximum age limits for a candidate for the quotas reserved for 'young people' coincide with the age of most of the young people elected.

In 2015, the three countries of the Maghreb had held legislative elections after the ‘Arab Spring’, offering corroborated results with respect to the political representation of young people. In this regard, the maximum age limits for the category of ‘young person’ reveal the contradiction that exists between guaranteeing a minimum representation of young people in the representative institutions and the existence of aging political elites that refuse to leave their positions. It is in the definition of the category of a ‘young’ member of parliament that the manipulation of age, previously highlighted by Bourdieu (2008) to illustrate the conflict between age groups, emerges strongly. Thus, the percentage of members of parliament under 30 was 6.5% in Tunisia (2014), 1.6% in Morocco (2011), and 1.1% in Algeria (2013). However, if 35 is considered the maximum age limit, the proportion of young members of parliament doubles in Tunisia (12.7%) and multiplies by seven in Morocco (12%), with 46 members of parliament. It should thus be pointed out that the political representation of young Maghrebis, as in other countries, does not occur smoothly but comes up against the opposition of a significant part of the political class.

### **The political context: Different national trajectories, the same feeling of electoral disaffection**

Despite gaining a number of civil rights, most young people do not participate in elections. Throughout the last decade, the level of youth participation in elections—of those registered on the electoral rolls—is no more than 35% in the various countries, although in reality less than 20% of young people between 18 and 35 tend to vote. While the high rate of electoral abstention seen in Algeria and Morocco could be explained as the result of the authoritarian nature of these regimes, where voting does not lead to any substantive change in the distribution of political power, the fact that this tendency also exists in Tunisia, after having initiated a democratic transition, stands out (Honwana, 2013).

#### *Tunisia: From the prominent revolutionary role of youth to political marginalization*

Since 2011, Tunisia has been the only country that has gone through a process of democratic transition, despite its ups and downs (Chouikha and Gobe, 2015; Allal and Geisser, 2018). In addition, the Tunisian youth were a major actor in the fall of the previous regime, triggering fierce clashes with the forces loyal to the Ben Ali regime since the beginning of the popular revolt on December 2010 until his flight on 14 January 2011. They then sparked the demonstrations of Casbah 1 and Casbah 2, forcing the resignation of Prime Minister Mohamed Ghannouchi in February 2011.

Observers tend to highlight the high participation of young people during the electoral campaign of the Constituent Assembly in October 2011. However, the political parties reserved little space for young people in the electoral lists and few allowed them to occupy positions of responsibility in the party structures. According to the data of ISIE (Tunisian Independent High Authority for Elections), only 17% of young people between 18 and 25 years registered to vote on the electoral register, and only half of people under 30 voted in 2011. The combination of the scant space given by the political parties to young people at the top of the electoral lists—due to the system of proportional representation, the high fragmentation of the vote, and the small number of seats per constituency—and low participation meant that only 28 young MPs under 30 years were elected among the 217 representatives of the Constituent Assembly.<sup>5</sup>

This lack of representation of young Tunisians, proclaimed agents of political change, led to the adoption of quotas in 2014 (Belschner, 2018). With this, in those constituencies with more than three seats, the political parties were encouraged—through financial penalties if they failed to

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<sup>5</sup> Barely present in electable positions in the electoral lists, only 4.9% of candidates under 30 years headed the lists. The survey carried out by the National Youth Observatory in 2013 shows that only 2.3% of the young people interviewed were members of a political party.

comply—to include a candidate under 35 within the top four positions on the electoralists. While the number of representatives under 30 increased, the political participation of young people in the elections remained very low, with estimates indicating a turnout of less than 20% of the electorate under 30 years.

If we add to these data the election of Caid Essebsi to the presidency of the Republic, who is 92 years old and who began his career in the Bourguiba period (1956–1987), it becomes clear that the political inclusion of young people in Tunisia is still a long way from doing justice to this sector of the population.

*The lost legitimacy of Moroccan political parties and the executive Monarchy: ‘Vote? What for?’*

In the wake of the fall of Ben Ali, the Moroccan monarchy was one of the few regimes in the region that opted fairly promptly for constitutional reform (Desrues, 2012b). However, unlike in Tunisia, this failed to lead to a process of democratic transition (Cavatorta, 2016; Desrues, 2018b). The road map of reform presented by King Mohammed VI in his speech of 9 March 2011 satisfied some historic demands made by the main political parties integrated within the consensus of the executive monarchy (Desrues, 2013), but it failed to satisfy those of the protest movement that had taken to the streets to demand political change. At the same time, the holding of early elections enabled the victory of the Islamist Justice and Development Party (JDP) for the first time in the country’s history (Desrues, 2012b). However, abstention in the November 2011 elections was high, which contributed to once again delegitimising the talk of democratic ‘consolidation’ of Mohammed VI’s reign.

For some time in Morocco, when young activists participate in internal discussions and debates, tensions surface, their opinions are not taken into consideration, and their legitimate ambitions are usually rejected in favour of the co-opting of other people, sometimes without any history of activism (Zerhouni, 2009; Desrues and Kirhlani, 2013). This reality is highlighted by Saloua Zerhouni after the ‘Arab Spring’ in her contribution to this special issue. She points to the influence of power structures and political practices on the lack of commitment to political parties and voting among young people. ‘Vote? What for?’ This is the recurring question that arises in a political context in which the great decisions are still taken in the palace, in which the official parties remain limited due to the exclusion of Islamist, Amazigh, or regionalist tendencies, and in which most of the political parties that have formed part of the succession of governmental coalitions over the last twenty years have given up presenting their own initiatives and are content to await the decisions of the monarch. At the same time, the youth sections of the main political parties are not mass organisations. While the youth members of left-wing parties have been considerably weakened after the successive splits of the USFP (Socialist Union of Popular Forces) and its internal divisions, the Islamist youth of the PJD seem to have replaced them, becoming one of the few critical voices with regard to the regime’s desire to ‘domesticate the party’. This same tendency can be seen in universities, where campuses have become an alternative space for the Islamist, Berber, and extreme-left tendencies that are unable to find legal cover in the political parties. Saloua Zerhouni also highlights the disrepute of the political institutions, as well as the

growing disconnection of politicians from the everyday reality of ordinary Moroccans, in particular young people. The issue of political and party options is therefore central to understanding the electoral abstention of young Moroccans.

The contribution of Olivier Deau and David Goeury complements Saloua Zerhouni's study, providing a generational reading of the processes of disaffection among young people, who, in their opinion, adopt political positions that are different from their elders and reveal their own political perspectives that lie outside the traditional structures of representation. The horizontal socialisation that they experience within their circle of friends, primarily through their participation in associations and strengthened by the use of social networks, favours the adoption of a new approach to political issues among these young people. Their contribution is of interest for another reason: it observes a number of different urban places that allow them to conclude that the youngest generations are probably more sensitive to the local level than the national level. At the local level, political phenomena are more easily observable and are territorially localised and embedded in areas that young people are personally acquainted with; while at the national level, young people feel disconnected and cut-off because decision-making is centralised and lacks transparency. In short, this contribution stresses that the high electoral abstention of young Moroccans in no way means that they are indifferent to, or fail to get involved in, civic activities when these affect their daily lives or their community.

### **The historical dilemma facing Algeria: When traumatic memories fail to stop young people's demands**

In the context of the changes of 2011, Algeria has been an exception in North Africa (Baamara, 2012; Martinez and Boserup, 2016; Del Panta, 2017; Mañé et al., 2017), however 2019 has shown that this was only an apparent stability (Serres, 2019). Elected consistently since 1999, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, born in 1937, was Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1963 and 1979. During the first ten years of his presidency, he benefitted from having managed to restore 'security' within the country, although the dramatic episode of the Black Spring of Kabylie in 2001 left a serious stain on his record (Tilmatine and Desrues, 2017). Since 2013, the precarious state of his health has meant that he is unable to move on his own and communicate with the public, with his paralysis, in some way, being a reflection of the political regime that he governs.

In 2011, the division of the parties of the official opposition, the clientelist distribution of hydrocarbon revenues,<sup>6</sup> the announcement by the presidency of a series of reforms and elections, as well as the repression of the first displays of discontent, and the still fresh memory of the violence during the black decade (1992–1999) made it difficult to form a unified protest movement (Baamara, 2012). Also influential was the still vivid memory of the revolt of October 1988, which, while it opened a period of three years of political liberalisation, ended up polarising society and leading to the violence of the black decade (1992–1999) (Desrues and Velasco, 2015). However, all of this should not let us forget the existence of the multiple protest movements that have emerged in recent years. While these are very localised and spread across many parts of the country, the fact is that their recurrence, their characteristic violence, and the frequent

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<sup>6</sup> The regime has taken some corrective measures to calm the anger on the street. This was aimed especially at young people that have benefitted from credit programmes through the National Youth Employment Support Agency (ANSEJ). In spite of the \$4 billion that has been paid out by the state, the problem is far from being resolved (Baghzouz, 2011). Furthermore, the ANSEJ system was appropriated by some young people using the traditional clientelist channels: most of the loans were not reimbursed and were mainly used to finance small commercial projects, or even for the purchase of products to flaunt their success (cars, travel, and so forth) or for emigration. See OULEBSIR, Nassima: 'Les jeunes méprisent les politiques', *Courrier International*, 28/04/2017. Available in <https://www.courrierinternational.com/article/algerie-legislatives-les-jeunes-meprisent-les-politiques> [Accessed on 12 January 2019].

intervention of the security forces to neutralise them has led to a deep disquietude. The protests have become increasingly long-lasting not only in the region of Kabylie (Tilmatine, 2017), but also in outlying regions further to the south of the capital, like M'zab, or in the wilayah (province) of Ouargla, which is rich in hydrocarbons (Hadj-Moussa, 2017).

In his contribution, Mohand Tilmatine (University of Cadiz) confirms, through a survey carried out on young undergraduates in the cities of Algiers and Tizi Ouzou in January 2017, the regime's loss of legitimacy, which is more pronounced in the Kabylie region. Furthermore, the gap between the youth and the gerontocracy in power seems to be heightened by the demographic weight of young people and the generational divide that exists between young people born during or after the 'civil war' (1992–1999)—which pitted the security forces against Islamists—and rulers who defend their legitimacy on the basis of their struggle against the French colonial power between 1954 and 1962. The survey's data shows the presence of a certain pluralism with respect to the definition of power, the nation or territorial organisation, and the system of government. This pluralism suggests that peaceful and democratic disagreement should become a regulatory part of the daily social relations in local communities, regions, and the regional and political representative institutions. Denial of this reality makes each political and ideological tendency seek hegemony and deny recognition of the other, which prevents peaceful co-existence and promotes the rise of polarised forces that exclude others, be they Salafist, secular, pan-Arabist, Algerian nationalist, or Kabyle independentist, to cite just a few examples.

These contradictory and in some sense opposed visions are expressed with particular force in the spheres of religion and women's rights. Carmen Garratón's study shows that Algeria is above all a diverse country, although this reality has been ignored and denied for years. The data from the survey she uses to analyse young people's views on gender relations and the issue of inheritance show that this pluralism often ends in irreconcilable divisions in the name of 'tradition', be it religious or local. Algeria thus still appears to be a country in which it is difficult for young people to shed the weight of tradition, especially in issues related to religious practice and family life. Carmen Garratón reminds us that the ruling on inheritance is inspired by Islamic law and treats the genders unequally, which contradicts the references to gender equality in the Algerian Constitution. It also shows that, in the case of Kabylie, the Berber tradition disinherits women from access to land in favour of the men in the family. Women make use of a whole range of reasons to justify their attitudes towards this inequality, such as the need to preserve family life, respect for Islamic law in order to obtain a part of the inheritance, or even defence of gender equality in order to attain an equal distribution among men and women. In short, young people interviewed in both Algiers and Kabylie, be they men or women, tend to justify gender inequality through arguments linked to tradition, whether religious or patriarchal. Nevertheless, Carmen Garratón's contribution also gathers opinions that argue for equal treatment for men and women, once again confirming the pluralism of Algerian society.

## Associations and protests: Alternative settings to official politics

The shortcomings of the existing democratic apparatus to represent the plurality of identities and interests are often criticised, or at least exposed, through associations or protests. For example, in Tunisia, where a significant percentage of young people feel that their elders have stolen the revolution from them, many have preferred to participate actively through other means, such as associations or public protest demonstrations and actions, instead of through formal politics, as embodied by political parties. The associative network is thus fertile ground when it comes to defending multiple causes and promoting services and actions of empowerment to the population (Desrues and Velasco, 2015), and in which aspirations can be developed and the social recognition of the community can be attained (Bahri et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it is also a space in which the intense demands of the population on the public authorities are covertly expressed, as well as the distrust that young people who have been socialised fundamentally in an authoritarian context have towards the public authorities. Furthermore, as Giovanni Cordova shows in his contribution, a significant proportion of young people feel disengaged from national politics and choose instead to devise other actions and strategies on a local level, rooted in the communities of peers with whom they interact. In effect, the associative network has experienced a significant surge in recent years in the three countries of the Maghreb<sup>7</sup>, and, in particular on a local level, it has relied on the participation and drive of young Maghrebis. We are referring to co-operatives and informal networks of solidarity and social support, of production of goods and services, and of social awareness and education with regard to certain causes. These, in turn, usually require the mobilisation of specific areas of knowledge and even of certain ‘professional profiles’ which, in some way, end up becoming skills and resources required for collective action. The associations also constitute a platform for participation in which the politicisation of their members, while not explicit, is not completely absent. Consequently, the participation of young people in associations can, in some sense, be seen as complementing or substituting their participation in the political sphere. And, in this regard, we can observe that, while some young people do not participate in either of the two spheres, others, in contrast, are committed actors on several fronts. Giovanni Cordova emphasises that the strength of the resurgence of the associative network in Tunisia after 2011 is due, in part, to its being rooted in the local network, which has previously served as a ‘laboratory of citizen participation’, above all in the outlying districts of the big cities, far from the centres of power and decision-making. As suggested in the study of Olivier Deau and David Goeury, it seems that young people are developing different patterns of action and participation than the rest of society. However, the question that remains unresolved is that of deciphering the link between both spheres—the associative and the political—and in particular between associations and political parties, since we still do not know whether these initiatives seek to be translated into public policies.

## Conclusions

The discourses and dichotomous data that have portrayed young Maghrebis as both a resource and a problem have been surpassed by the events of recent years, in which youth mobilisation has transformed this social category into a public problem, challenging the legitimacy of the political regimes of the Maghreb. The numerous reports of the national and supranational institutions that co-operate with these countries (the United Nations Development Programme—UNDP; the World Bank; the European Union, and so forth) have insisted for years that they develop real national policies and strategies aimed at young people and promote their social and political participation<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> In Tunisia, the number of associations grew from 9,969 in 2011 to 14,729 in 2013; in Morocco, from 44,711 in 2009 to 116,000 in 2014; and in Algeria, from 81,000 in 2008 to more than 90,000 in 2012. See Desrues (2019).

<sup>8</sup> By way of illustration, we point to the following speeches and documents: ‘Stratégie du PNUD pour la jeunesse 2014-2017. Autonomisation des jeunes pour un avenir durable’, *PNUD*, 2014, available in



These reports usually make an assessment based on the demographic weight of young people and their conditions of socio-economic exclusion, electoral abstention, and capacity to protest. The main concerns that emerge are their social and political participation and their values and beliefs. From unemployment to illegal emigration, from idleness to risk behaviours and onto ideological radicalisation, the solution to these highly diverse problems appears to lie in the participation of young people in the decision-making institutions and bodies and in the development of assessments and public policies that relate to them. An active citizenship and the representation of young people in politics and in associations should be encouraged in order to promote 'positive socio-economic dynamics and the political stability of countries', where '(informed, autonomous, and committed) young people will be the leaders of human development and the driving force of robust nations in the present and future.' However, both this vision of young Maghrebis and the policies focused on promoting their participation and representation face a number of obstacles. The first of them is the contrast between the very pessimistic presentation of the social conditions of young people and the idealistic normative solutions based on their political and civic participation. The second is that, as Didier Lapeyronnie (2005) reminds us, youth is defined, among other things, by its 'non-engagement', by the opposition of adults and specific institutions to young people's aspirations, and by the assignment and imposition of certain roles that young people themselves question. These tendencies vary according to the opportunities and capacity for social, political, and professional integration of young people themselves. The difficulties and obstacles that young people come up against in their transition to adulthood means, in turn, that tensions and frustrations accumulate along the journey.

The protest movements led by young people in the different countries of the Maghreb after 2011, like those that took place in Tunisia between May 2017 and January 2018 (Larramendi and Thieux, 2018), or those led by young Riffians in the province of Al Hoceima in Morocco between October 2016 and July 2017 (Wolf, 2018), show once again the limits of the electoral process and the magnitude of the economic challenges to satisfy the demands of the population. Furthermore, the refusal of the authorities to recognise young people, the spokespersons of the protest movements, as legitimate interlocutors, is seen as yet another form of humiliation. This is also the case in Algeria. In February 2019, the announcement by Abdelaziz Bouteflika that he was running for president for a fifth consecutive term triggered the uprising of young people, mainly students. This time they were immediately followed by the population as a whole to call peacefully for a democratic transition. This is not an isolated event, however, because in 2014 and in November 2018 there were demonstrations against the president standing again. Protests in recent years in Morocco and in recent months in Algeria have been seen by analysts as a replication of the

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<http://www.undp.org/content/undp/fr/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/youthstrategy.html> [Accessed on 12 March 2019]; HOEL, Arne : 'Le défi de l'insertion des jeunes au Maroc' (interview with Gloria La Cava, a specialist in social sciences at the World Bank, who lead the drafting of the report), *World Bank*, 14 May 2012, available in <http://www.banquemondiale.org/fr/news/feature/2012/05/14/challenge-of-youth-inclusion-in-morocco> [Accessed on 12 March 2019]; 'Discours de Federica Mogherini , Haute représentante de l'Union européenne pour les Affaires étrangères et la Sécurité à l'Université d'Alger III, lors des célébrations des 30 ans d'Erasmus', Algiers, 9 April 2017, available in [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/24452/discours-de-federica-mogherini-luniversite-dalger-iii-lors-des-celebrations-des-30-ans\\_tr](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/24452/discours-de-federica-mogherini-luniversite-dalger-iii-lors-des-celebrations-des-30-ans_tr) [Accessed on 29 April 2017].

protests that led to the democratisation process in Tunisia. In other words, these protests have been seen as a call for freedom, understood as citizen dignity; for justice, understood as an equitable redistribution of national wealth; and for the full recognition of young Maghrebis as people with civil, political, and social rights, and also for the end of the 'hogra'—a very common expression in recent years that represents the humiliation meted out by the authorities.

It is worth considering the hypothesis that the recurrence and coincidence of youth mobilisation in the three countries, later joined by adolescents and adults, is at the end of the day also a questioning of the definition of youth in negative terms—of exclusion, insecurity, and political, social, and civic apathy. In this regard, we are probably witnessing a change of paradigm that reconfigures the boundaries of the social categories of age. Young Maghrebis appear to be rejecting the categories into which they have been confined by the gerontocracies that hold the economic and political decision-making powers. Thus, and although the relation between biological and social age is always a complex one, young Maghrebis seem to want to take control and exercise their political adulthood through street protests, demanding their right to decide on issues that relate to them and expressing their discomfort and distrust of the established authorities. Unfortunately, the history of the region demonstrates that these same authorities have been able to skilfully manipulate the divisions and differences that affect these societies, with the aim of hindering the true exercise of social and political pluralism. These divisions relativise the sociological category of youth and are often used to pit the different social classes and groups with different linguistic, confessional, regional, and tribal affinities against each other. Therefore, the analyses presented in this dossier contribute to the knowledge on political, social, and civic behaviours, situations, and opinions of the Maghrebi young people. All this knowing that this line is still open due to the appearance of new events that will probably influence the near future, given the serious representation and intermediation crisis suffered amongst the young people from this region.

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