



Dossier

Youth Participation in Politics

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1- Introduction

After the uprising in the Arab World starting 2011, it is not possible to deny that politics and people's views to politics have changed a lot. The participation of many youth in the movements calling for the change in the political system had a big impact on the lives of the community members.

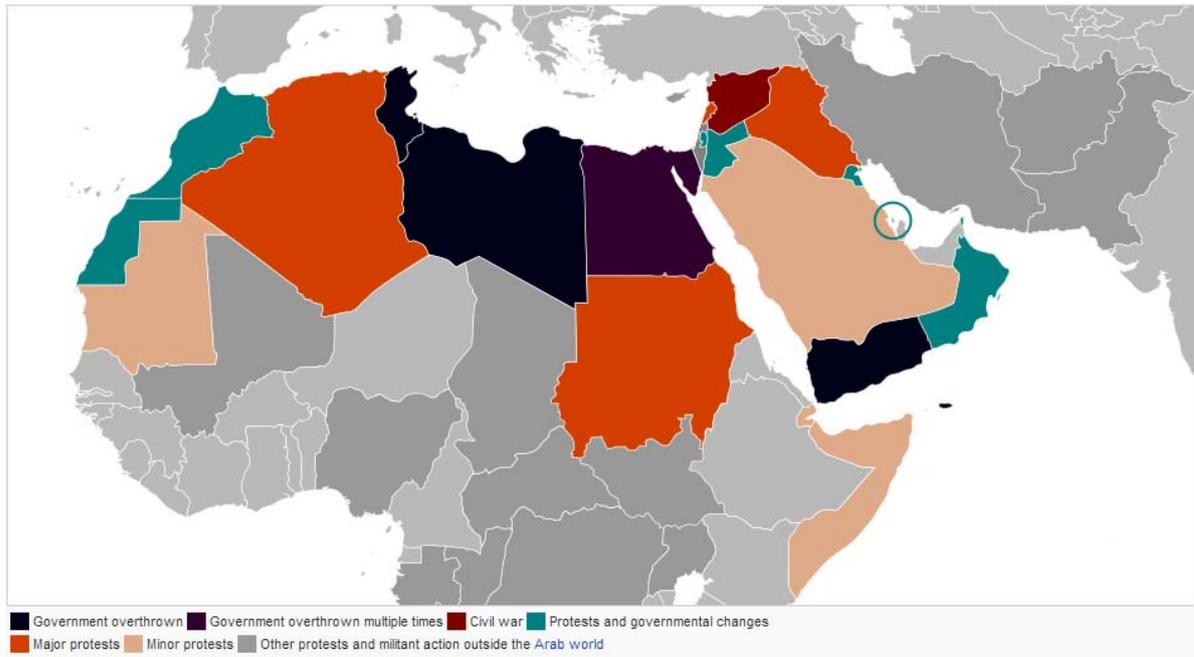
Today and after three years of the uprising, fewer youth are engaged in movements, be it through political parties or non-governmental organizations. This report will be discussing youth participation in political life, specifically through political parties and through the electoral process.

Before going into the report, it is crucial to highlight the importance of the focus on youth and their engagement in political life, leading to their engagement in the public concern.

From the Arab Digest on Youth Political Participation and Decision making in the Arab states, a general overview is given about the Arab Region:

- One out of every five persons in the Arab Region is between 15 and 24 years old and more than half of the population is below the age of 25;
- Arab countries have one of the highest regional youth unemployment rate in the world, particularly affecting young Arab females;
- Youth are almost entirely excluded from participation within parliaments in almost half of the Arab countries reaching a low of 7%;
- The average age of parliamentarians in the world is 53 (50 years old for women parliamentarians).

The following figure shows the summary of changes in each country in the Arab World:



Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arab_Spring#Summary_of_conflicts_by_country

In Europe, in 2013 youth in general constituted of 17.9% of the total population. According to Eurostat, the percentages of youth between the age of 15 and 29 years old in Europe in 2013 were the following: Europe 17.9% - Greece 16.8% - Italy 15.4% - Portugal 16.5%.

With both statistics, it is visible that youth in the world have a large role in participation in the public concern. Thus it is very important to work on engaging youth in the political life because they will be the future generation responsible of improving the situation that is being lived.

Youth engagement in political life – levels of participation:

Based on EACEA "Youth Participation in Democratic Life" Annual Report, a normative conception of youth participation, defining political participation broadly, is about engaging in forming opinions and taking actions to bring positive change in society. It can take different forms, examples:

- Participation of young people in representative democracy: standing for or voting in elections or membership in political parties;
- Participation of young people in participatory structures: promoting the involvement of more young people in structures, such as youth organizations or issue-based NGOs or volunteering;
- Participation in debate: on youth or community issues; opinion-shaping through written press or youth radio, participating in online discussion for a, writing or following blogs
- Seeking information and learning about democracy: participating in simulations of political processes, attending training or learning at school, engaging in youth organizations.

Youth participation, in other words, fosters a sense of citizenship and makes policy processes more transparent and accountable towards young people. At the same time, it helps youth people build self-confidence, develop a sense of initiative and acquire and test skills that are relevant for the workplace, such as communication, negotiation or teamwork, in a practical environment.

In Europe, participation in public life is a fundamental right that was recognized in article 10.3 TEU of the Lisbon Treaty (2009) and states: "Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union." The statement emphasizes the participation in democratic life within the union and within each country.

In some of the Arab countries and through its constitutions, it is stated that the political system is a democratic one but there are many challenges that stand in the way of youth participation in politics, which will be included in this report.

For example in Lebanon, Article 7 of the Lebanese constitution states that "All Lebanese are equal in front of the law and they have their civil and political rights and the bear public responsibilities without any difference amongst them. Even though by law all are equal but in practice, many obstacles face youth who would like to make a political change in the country.

What is politics?

According to Wikipedia, politics is the practice and theory of influencing other people on a global, civic, or individual level. More narrowly, it refers to achieving and exercising positions of governance – organized control over a human community, particularly a state. A variety of methods are employed in politics, which include:

- Promoting one's own political views among people;
- Negotiation with other political subjects;
- Making laws;
- Exercising force.

The theory behind politics is definitely not the one in practice, and this is one of the reasons why community members, especially youth, are not engaged in political life.

In a small social media interaction methodology used, specifically asking what can youth say about youth participation in politics, here were some answers:

- A young male from Libya said that youth should be engaged in politics since there would be a new generation of politicians who have an influence in the world.
- A young male from Greece said that there is a need to focus more on the education and have a reform in the educational system, increase employment opportunities, and access to health care to all. Only when the baseline of living standards are met that we can request from youth to participation in politics.
- A young female from Lebanon said that "having youth engaged in politics could be a sort of solution in our case, especially if they were not the sibling of any politician. Youth groups can certainly make a difference because they have the ambition and the true perspective and they know the situation of other youth in their country so they'll make sure to find solutions."
- A young male from Lebanon said that "to me this has always been the true dilemma on our society. I am one of the unfortunately. This participation is inevitable to "some". Talking vigorously or decently to the other political side

has been the only way of stating an opinion. Not to mention that youth politics aided the interfering of "religion" with the local conflict in some way."

2- Why do not youth participate in politics?

As much as engaging in politics is important for the development of the country, based on the previous description of politics, youth are still not encouraged enough to be part of the change process, and this is due to a variety of reasons, including but not limited to the following:

- 1- Laws and regulations don't provide the right to youth participation, for example in Lebanon, the age of voting is 21 years and the age of running for elections is 25 years. This means that the young person who is 18 years old can be sentenced to prison as an adult but cannot elect until he/she is 21 years old.
- 2- Lack of young citizens' trust in their elected representatives – because of the negative reputation and impression that the politicians are giving to the citizens and to the world, young people tend to stay away from politics rather than engaging in another way.
- 3- General knowledge of the parliament/local government and how they work – in most of the countries in the Arab region, the educational system doesn't provide information and skills that can be used to engage youth in political life.
- 4- Focus on day-to-day priorities rather than politics – the high unemployment rate and the instability in the Arab region has led the youth to focus more on improving their economic status rather than engaging in politics. Even in Europe, the focus on the socio-economic status is taking a priority over the focus on elections and participation in politics.
- 5- General perception that political parties are "dirty" – many youth in the Arab region view politics as "dirty" and the political parties as players in this game. There is little trust from the citizens and youth in specific that the political parties can improve the situation that the country is in.
- 6- In Europe, during the last two decades two major political changes took place that can explain part of the youth absenteeism. The first relates to the

legitimacy for the process of European integration and the controversies surrounding it. People's role in decision-making has fallen behind the rapid increase of power that the EU has acquired. The second major political change relates to the general voting decline of the public that can be derived from changes in the forms of political socialization and activism.

3- Youth participation in elections

Europe

From the Eurostat website, the following details about the elections in Europe are shown in the table below:

	National Elections		
Countries			
EU28	68.6% 2011	68% 2012	67.9% 2013
Greece	74.1% 2007	70.9% 2009	62.5% 2012
Italy	83.6% 2006	80.5% 2008	75.2% 2013
Portugal	61.5% 2006	59.7% 2009	58% 2011

It can be noticed that the percentage is generally decreasing in the national elections of each of the three targeted countries. This shows that there is less trust in the national elections. This also represents the decrease in youth participation in the political life.

From a study that was made by the European Commission, the following findings should be taken into consideration when talking about youth participation in elections:

- In 20 EU Member States, the majority of respondents from the study made have voted in a political election in the past three years. Voting among young people is particularly high in Malta (76%), Belgium (73%), and Italy (71%).

- The most frequently mentioned reasons given by respondents who are likely to vote for taking part in the election (64%) are the belief in democracy (94%), that Europe and European elections are important (90%) and that voting is the right way to influence political decision-making (83%).
- For the respondents who expressed the reasons for not voting, 64% believed that their vote will not change anything, 61% said that they are not sufficiently informed to vote, 56% of them said that the European Parliament does not sufficiently deal with problems that concern them, and 54% said that they are not interested in European politics and elections.

A small chart shows the variations in age groups and different demographics that would help form an idea about the elections. The base that the study was made on was 12,927 persons.

Q1 During the last 3 years, did you vote in any political election at the local, regional or national level? If you were, at that time, not eligible to vote, please say so.

	Yes	No, did not vote in an election	No, because you were not old enough to vote	Don't know	Total 'No'
EU27	56%	21%	23%	0%	44%
Sex					
Male	57%	21%	22%	0%	43%
Female	56%	21%	23%	0%	44%
Age					
15-19	15%	10%	75%	0%	85%
20-24	72%	24%	3%	1%	27%
25-30	74%	25%	1%	0%	26%
Education (End of)					
15-	50%	34%	15%	1%	49%
16-19	59%	31%	10%	0%	41%
20+	80%	20%	-	0%	20%
Still studying	41%	10%	49%	0%	59%
Subjective urbanisation					
Rural village	56%	19%	25%	0%	44%
Small/ Mid-size town	56%	20%	24%	0%	44%
Large town	59%	24%	17%	0%	41%
Respondent occupation scale					
Self-employed	72%	24%	4%	0%	28%
Employee	73%	22%	4%	1%	26%
Manual workers	64%	29%	7%	0%	36%
Not working	45%	18%	37%	0%	55%

Base: All respondents (12,927)

A small note on the European Elections: voting is compulsory for at least some elections in Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, and Luxembourg. The voting age is 18 for most of the elections in the EU Member States and Croatia, with the exception of Austria where the voting age is 16.

Another article titled "High youth absenteeism at the European Parliament elections is directly linked to the failure of political parties to address young people and youth issues" states the following:

- In European Parliament elections held in 2009, 50% of over 55 years olds made use of their vote, whereas only 29% of the 18 to 24 year olds voted.

This leaves younger citizens in a marginalized position, as the majority of the Parliament is representative on the concerns of the older voters.

This resembles that local and national politics is more interesting for youth than the EU politics. Are there any reforms or steps that can be done to increase youth participation in political life in Europe in general and in the three countries specifically?

Egypt

According to an article from "The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy", after the winning of former Defense Minister Abdel Fattah El Sisi against his opponent Hamdeen Sabahy in the Egyptian presidential elections, and before the release of official numbers, the view on Tahrir Square, would show the following: a celebratory gathering, fireworks, and some pedestrians and cars interacting with the crowd, the same as any other celebration of a political victory. There was one main difference, there weren't much youth participating in these celebrations.

The absence of youth from Tahrir Square was reflected at polling stations over the three voting days, the longest voting period in Egypt's history. "The youth are shocked," one police officer who was responsible for securing the Amr Ibn al-'As school in Manial and who spoke under condition of anonymity, chose to explain it. He added, "Sisi promised not to run for the presidency and yet he did. This continuous reversion on decisions and not finding real solutions to the problems facing the youth has disillusioned them."

The police and army personnel exerted all possible effort to explain the absence in front of polling stations over the three voting days. In spite of that, their words could not hide their disappointment at the absence of youth from the polls. With this in mind, the police officer tried to beautify the situation, saying "the best thing I saw over the voting days is that a lot of people above 80, who had nothing more to ask of the world, showed up, voting for their children's sake."

It seems, however, that many youth were not happy with the older generation's actions and political leanings, and disagree that the "older people" were voting for their sake. Diaan Adel, 23, expressed his extreme discontent with the older generation's allegations that they made political decisions for the sake of their children. He addressed them emphatically: "Do not say you are doing this for your children, your children don't want that."

Adel had voided his ballot, explaining “I was planning to abstain, but I was walking past my polling station by chance and found it empty, so I walked in as a joke. I then felt sorry for the policemen and army cadets so I decided to vote... And I did, for Liverpool [Football Club].” He laughed, then went on to say “We are the youth who have been on the streets for three years, and we know that both candidates will not do. We know the truth of the political situation from what we see with our very own eyes, unlike our parents whose information comes from watching television and who have never seen the situation for themselves.”

Among youth, the group that seemed to express the most fervent negativity was the university student population. Amir Eid, a senior at the Faculty of Engineering of Cairo University, who abstained from the vote, said “Almost our entire class did not vote. Those who went either went to void their votes so they would not pay the 500 pound fine or forced themselves to vote for Sabahy.”

Independent political analyst Mohamed Naiem commented on this, saying, “The position of the youth towards the election stems from anger not condemnation... They realize that there is a lot of ‘nonsense’ which they do not want to include themselves in [sic].” Naiem explained with a simple example: “The youth, sitting at their street cafes, make fun of whomever they hear went and voted because they know that the whole process is useless. This kind of peer pressure gets to youth.” He sees that this anger shows up in youth gathering areas like universities and stadia. He gave the example of the Egyptian football league, ongoing to this day with no audience and no plans of an audience attending any time soon because of this anger and because most football fans are youth.

Apart from those whose participation was affected by current events, there were others for who abstaining was a matter of principal, and who have boycotted all votes since the January revolution. Sally Toma, political activist and the founder of the

“Kazeboon” (Liars) campaign, believes that the idea of elections is being promoted in a way that tricks the people, making them believe that democracy is only about the ballot box and its result; Toma thinks it’s really about more than that. She said: “What happens is nothing but a farce of democracy. If the revolution had succeeded we would have started neutral institutions from the very beginning before carrying out presidential elections. What democracy is this when all institutions participating in the process are unelected and corrupt?”

Do most of the youth in Egypt feel the same way about their participation in politics and it being useless?

Palestine

According to the article titled "Young Palestinians prepare for politics" from UNDP's website, when young people, particularly young men feel excluded and are unable to have a say in the way their communities are run, the likelihood of political violence increases.

In the West Bank and Gaza, where political issues are often resolved through violence, years of conflict and recently - political stalemate between the two main parties has resulted in a decline in civic and political participation – especially for young people.

Before the elections in September 2013, more than 23,000 young Palestinians--39 percent of whom were women--turned up to vote at the first electronic polls in the region, and 132 were elected as members of the Youth Parliament. Through the initiative, young people not only learned how to make their voices heard about issues that affect their lives, but also took part in training that one day – may help them to become the country's future leaders. During recent elections, youth registration was highest in marginalized communities, with characteristically few opportunities for civic participation, such as the Gaza strip.

The recent war from Israel on Gaza has led as in previous years for the priority of the whole community to shift towards relief and emergency rather than focus on democracy awareness or political engagement.

If the violence continues and no peaceful solution was to be taken, would youth be expected to participate in political life in a positive and effective manner?

Morocco

To help prepare young people to take part in the upcoming Moroccan elections, national and international organisations recently teamed up in Rabat.

From June 25th-28th, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, (APCE) along with the Moroccan National Human Rights Council (CNDH) and the "Jeunes pour Jeunes" (Young People for Young People) association met in Rabat to plan strategies to encourage youth involvement in democracy.

The association has already launched a website, where members of parliament can answer the concerns of young, would-be voters, Ahmed Rizki said Friday.

"The aim is to get young people to put their names on electoral lists, turn out to vote and participate in public affairs, especially at the local and regional levels," the "Jeunes pour Jeunes" head added.

Transforming young people's creative potential into energy so that they can be involved in society and the democratic process poses a challenge, the head of the Division for Education and Training at the Youth Department of the Council of Europe said.

Young people's participation in democracy should not be limited to involvement in political bodies, even though this aspect is of the utmost importance, Rui Gomes added.

This participation should also foster a democratic and civic culture among young people, he explained, noting that this was the job of the community leaders and the local and regional authorities. This view was shared by Moroccan Youth and Sports Minister Mohamed Ouzzine, who said that the government was taking concrete steps to this end.

The national youth integration strategy, which was recently adopted by the government, is intended to invest in young people due to their key role in development, he noted.

He explained that the scheme was also meant to shape the approaches of a range of public-sector and private-sector actors in the form of a social charter in order to get young people involved in all aspects of life.

This strategy will enable Morocco to make a qualitative leap forward as it reflects young people's recommendations and aspirations, the government official said. Young people with aspirations to participate in economic, social and political life were involved in the decision making. Yet many youths remain skeptical.

Although politicians and government figures are giving young people pride of place in what they say, the reality is the opposite, a 24-year-old accountant Karim Charaf said. "Young people are still marginalised in the governing bodies of political parties. They are suffering due to unemployment and are the most vulnerable socio-economic category," he told Magharebia.

"So far, we have not seen any tangible action in terms of getting young people involved in democracy. I fear that this situation will have a negative impact on turnout at the elections," he noted.

Salma Taibi, a 25-year-old management assistant, said that although young people were assigned a quota in parliament to help them participate in democracy, this step was "not enough by itself. We need to think about helping young people to be represented in decision-making bodies. But first and foremost, the authorities must think hard about the issue of youth employment, because without economic independence, young people cannot have dignity."

"This means that young people will never be able to participate in democracy to the desired extent. So we have to think about the socio-economic integration of young people so that they can play their full part in political life," she said.

Do youth in Morocco have to improve their economic situation and they would be able to engage in politics better or they have to participate politically in order to improve their economic situation?

Tunisia

According to the article titled "Tunisian voter stats misrepresent youth apathy", only 17 percent of Tunisian youth are interested in politics, and only 27 percent cast their votes in the National Constituent Assembly election, according to statistics released by the Tunisian Ministry of Youth and Sports earlier this year.

These numbers reflect apathy toward political participation and national affairs, mainly because Tunisian youth find themselves largely excluded from the national political scene.

While these numbers are troubling, they don't tell the whole story about youth. Tunisian youth are still searching for alternative ways to affect change. Focus for some has turned to civil society, where they are finding opportunities to help bring about this change. Others can do the same.

According to 30-year-old Al-Jumhuri Party (Republican Party) member NajwaKarmi, 23 years of dictatorship and marginalization created a situation where many youth lack the experience, knowledge and skills required for political participation. That said, youth automatically find themselves in the back seats.

Slim Omri (24), a young person from SidiBouazid, said youth absence from politics is linked to the fact that elected parties failed to uphold the promise of a better future for all.

According to SouhaBouazizi (25) from SidiBouazid and member of the Youth Council of SidiBouazid, there is a different reason for a lack of youth involvement in politics: "The cut with political life occurred when the National Constituent Assembly [NCA] was elected on Oct. 23, 2011 and we realized that the majority of its members were old. This was the day where hope for youth involvement in Tunisian politics died."

Regardless of the reason, low youth participation in politics doesn't mean that Tunisian youth are not causing positive change to happen.

Both Bouazizi and RamziSlimani, a member of the Protection of Heritage and Cultural Tourism Association of SidiBouazid, responded to political disillusionment by engaging in civil society.

He and other members of the association helped frame, finance and provide marketing assistance for 20 young women from rural areas who weave carpets to make a living. Slimani describes his experience as beneficial to both himself and the city. They have also petitioned authorities to establish a tourist circuit in the city.

When Bouazizi joined the Youth Council of SidiBouazid he joined 20 other 18-30 year olds who wanted to solve local issues in their city, like violence in schools, and to build a relationship with local government through dialogue.

“Our objective is to improve the role of security services to make the city safe,” Bouazizi said. Indeed, last October, the council organized roundtables and workshops with media, civil society activists and jurists to discuss what should be done to improve security in SidiBouazid. They drafted a letter to the Ministry of the Interior and the NCA in which they explained what kind of reform is needed, and intend to provide recommendations in the near future. The Youth Council has furthermore worked to identify concerns of youth in SidiBouazid through a widely distributed questionnaire. These results too will be sent to local authorities.

While many Tunisian youth feel they were left out of national politics, there have found other ways to help create a better future for our cities and for our country.

What would be the next step for youth in Tunisia to make it safer and would it have a positive impact in their participation in the political life?

Lebanon

The first thing that comes to mind when talking about elections is the lack of participation of youth under the age of 21 in the electoral process since by law they are abstained from this right. This excludes a large number of youth who can actually participate in the political life through the elections process.

Another level which must be taken into consideration is the university level, where youth are normally prepared for the public life. At many universities, including the Lebanese University (the national university of the country), student elections are prohibited. This decision was due to many violent clashes happening between the youth during the elections and thus the administrations of those universities decided not to have elections for the student council in the first place. This also increased the gap of awareness and level of engagement in the electoral process among youth.

This affects negatively the engagement of youth in the electoral process since there is a lack of prior practice within the schools, universities, and other platforms. Two main challenges face the Lebanese youth in particular when it comes to elections: clientelism and sectarianism.

The socio-economic background of Lebanon and the bad economic situation forces youth in some cases to have a specific vote in elections. Lebanese main political leaders and parties are also controlling a major part of the Lebanese economy. This means that many youth can't have an independent voice in elections due to their connection to a life-securing job that is led by a certain political affiliation. This decreases youth engagement in political life.

The second challenge, which is sectarianism, has caused throughout the years not only a political divide but also a decrease in the voting principle. The differences in Lebanon according to sects from one side and having the main political parties a majority-one-sect-political-parties has caused the youth to prioritize their choice on the sect rather than the elections values or the national concern.

One example on this, Lebanese Parliament is now discussing the extension of the mandate of the parliament for the second time. In concept, democracy and the right to free and transparent elections would be hindered, but very few of the Lebanese youth

are taking actions to prevent the parliament from taking this decision. This goes back to many reasons that are interconnected with the lack of participation in elections but the result would be the constant political situation that youth can't change.

What can be the window of change in Lebanon for more youth participation in political life?

Below is one of the best practices that have been implemented is the Parliament Watch Website (<https://www.abgeordnetenwatch.de/ueber-uns/mehr/international>).

Parliament Watch enables citizens to:

- Question their members of parliament in a public environment
- Find out about the voting record of their members of parliament
- Follow up on promises made (all questions and answers are saved forever)
- Learn about all the extra earnings of members of parliament

So far, Parliament Watch has been set up for France, Ireland, Austria, Luxemburg, Greece, and Tunisia.

According to the website, "Parliament Watch counts 6,800 visitors per day and about three million page impressions per month. More than 80% of all MP of the federal parliament answer questions through Parliament Watch. In Germany, the project covers the federal parliament, the European parliament, nine state parliaments and 54 parliaments on the communal level. All in all the digital voters' memory counts 162,238 questions and 131,216 answers (as of December, 31th, 2013)."

Such a tool is very important to engage youth in politics and try to influence the internal and foreign policy of the country that they are from.

4- Political Parties in the Arab World and the EU

Before going into assessing the reality of the political parties in the Arab World and the EU, a clear definition of a political party is needed. According to DPNA's knowledge guide "Youth and Political Parties", the political parties were established in the West initially due to the socio-economic and political development within the societies, with the aim of managing differences, diversities, and the reach for power between the various groups in the societies. Most importantly, the political parties achieve its aim through democratic and non-violent manner.

For that, political parties contribute to building the political society and renewing it, to engaging the public opinion, to developing public policies, to putting a methodology to rule and manage the public concern.

As a definition, political parties are organized groups, relatively constant/stable, representing the interests of certain groups and recruit members and supporters around common programs, goals, and values, where the political party fits their demands and voices out their thoughts. Reaching power or participating in it or influencing it on both local and national levels, is one of the main goals of political parties in representational democracies, in which they mobilize masses in order to do that through specific electoral or constitutional mechanisms.

In Europe, the political parties are in many ways considered “virtually irrelevant social organisations” (Van Biezen, Mair and Poguntke: 2012). This is mainly due to political parties shift towards applying election-winning techniques that are causing a political apathy in much of the public. The parties are “emphasizing mediated and professionalized communication rather than direct mobilization of constituencies”.

Through focusing on election-winning techniques, rather than deliberative and participatory actions, the parties are losing contact with society; causing them to neglect activities shaping young people’s political socialization. Through regulations, as well as the institutionalization of political parties, they have been enabled to shift their political strength and “become relatively independent of their supporters and civil society in general”.

In the Arab World, youth's perception can be categorized into four levels:

- Youth who are engaged in political parties and consider them an essential part of any reform or development to happen in the country.
- Youth who are not engaged in political parties but consider them an essential party of any reform or development to happen in the country.
- Youth who are not engaged in political parties and consider them the reason behind the lack of reform and development in the country.
- Youth who are not engaged in political parties and prioritize their socio-economic life above all and are not engaged in the political life in the country.

Are political parties part of the civil society?

According to the third issue of the Democracy Around the World in 2008 by World Savvy, political parties are part of the civil society. The civil society is defined as a generally composed of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and associations – social, religious, issue-oriented, charitable, political – that individuals can join voluntarily to further their interests, make connections with others, and improve their communities."

The article continues by stating "Political parties are an important part of civil society in a democracy. Parties organize and support political participation of individuals – both voters and candidates. For the voter, they simplify the process. Voters do not necessarily need to be educated on every candidate's views on all issues. Often membership in a political party with a clear platform becomes a short-cut. When in doubt, the voter can default to voting for the ticket of his/her party, and, if the parties function as they are designed to, be reasonably certain that the vote represents his or her interests. For the candidate parties provide key infrastructure, fundraising, publicity, and professionalism. In fact, in modern democracies, it is nearly impossible to run without the support of a well-established party mechanism. Parties also support candidates once they are elected and assume office in myriad of ways. Because their influence is so pervasive in all stages of the democratic process, it is extraordinarily

important that like other civil society organizations, parties be free of government restrictions and have the capacity to manage the power of corrupting special interests."

Another opinion states that political parties' aim is to get to power and this stops them from being able to advocate or pressure the government if they are part of it and thus political parties cannot be considered part of the civil society.

Challenges facing youth in political parties

There are many challenges that face youth in engagement within political parties, some of them which can be found below – bearing in mind that the following challenges are not specific to each country but more of a general scheme that applies to some political parties and some youth:

- 1- Political parties that are active or in power are not qualified to engage youth since their internal structures are rigid and don't allow democracy to take place.
- 2- Youth can't find political parties who represent their thoughts and aspirations towards their vision of the country and some of the reforms that they call for.
- 3- Youth prefer to be on an equal distance from all political parties and not engage in one of them.
- 4- Youth prefer to engage in non-governmental organizations since they consider them as an alternative to political parties and they work on community and public concern issues.
- 5- Youth prefer intellectual independence since enrolling in a political party will force them to have the principles and positions of the political party, whereas they want to have their own beliefs.
- 6- Political parties in the Arab World don't have much success stories and thus there is no encouragement for youth to engage in political parties. Specifically speaking, many political parties engaged in armed conflicts – Lebanon 1975 until today, Egypt Morocco and Tunisia after the uprising.

In the Arab World in general, female participation in the political life is still very low and this is being reflected in many national and local politics in each of the countries that are discussed.

Lebanon will be taken for example. On the national level, there are 4 members of Lebanese Parliament who are females, out of 128. There is only one female in the current government and no females in the previous one.

In the last local government (municipality) elections in Lebanon, female participation with respect to their representation in the municipalities is as follows:

Governorate	Caza	Women who were elected	Men who were elected	Number of Total Seats	Percentage of Women Participation	Percentage in Governorate
Beirut	Beirut City	3	21	24	12.50%	12.50%
Beqaa	West Beqaa	10	368	378	2.65%	2.38%
	Rashayya	8	277	285	2.81%	
	Hermel	1	80	81	1.23%	
	Baalbeck	17	793	810	2.10%	
	Zahle	12	372	384	3.13%	
		51	1911	1962		
Mount Lebanon	Jbeil	13	383	396	3.28%	5.26%
	Keserwan	26	517	543	4.79%	
	Metn	51	543	594	8.59%	
	Baabda	36	504	540	6.67%	
	Aley	29	580	609	4.76%	
	Chouf	30	828	858	3.50%	
		185	3355	3540		
North Lebanon	Batroun	25	236	261	9.58%	8.42%
	Koura	42	309	351	11.97%	
	Bcharri	16	125	141	11.35%	
	Zgharta	28	308	336	8.33%	
	Menye-Donneyye	12	381	393	3.05%	
	Tripoli	5	55	60	8.33%	
	Akkar	75	1107	1182	6.35%	
		203	2521	2724		
South Lebanon & Nabatieh	Jezzine	26	337	363	7.16%	2.97%
	Saida	22	533	555	3.96%	
	Tyre	17	727	744	2.28%	
	Bent Jbeil	5	484	489	1.02%	
	Hasbayya	5	178	183	2.73%	
	Nabatieh	7	515	522	1.34%	
	Marjeyoun	8	346	354	2.26%	
		90	3120	3210		
					Total Women Participation	6.31%

The above graph presents that in average, female participation in local governments was 6.31%, and in some areas it was as low as 2.38%.

In most of the Arab Countries, there are many challenges that face females in participating in local and national politics, of which are presented below.

Challenges that face women in engaging in political life are, but not limited to:

- 1- The gendered patriarchal order of political parties in some countries, where many political parties are male-oriented and led. Political party members may consider the high positions in political parties to be male-positions and thus wouldn't accept to have women in leadership positions.
- 2- Masculine societies, where some communities don't accept women to be engaged in out-of-home activities or events. This is specifically visible in rural communities in the Arab World. The urban areas are starting to be more open to the idea of women engagement in political life.
- 3- Religious influence on politics, where in the Arab World religion plays a big role in shaping politics and thus religious leaders don't support women engagement in political life.
- 4- Inequality towards women, where in many countries women are not given all their civic rights, for example, in Lebanon, women who are married to foreigners cannot give their children the citizenship thus affecting her rights of being a Lebanese citizen.
- 5- In rural communities, family values still prevail where women are expected to be at home and supporting the family rather than engaging in the economic or the political life.

Conclusion

After giving a general overview on youth engagement in political life, here are some open ended questions for you to discuss and give an answer to:

- a. Are there more challenges that face youth in engaging in political life?
- b. Are there more challenges that face young females in engaging in political parties?
- c. In any country, the development triangle consists of three main pillars, the public sector, the private sector, and the civil society. What can each of those three pillars do/change in order to increase youth participation in political life.

In other words:

- i. What can the public sector do to encourage youth participation in politics.
 - ii. What can the private sector do to encourage youth participation in politics.
 - iii. What can the civil society do to encourage youth participation in politics.
- d. What can youth do to increase their engagement in political life?
 - e. What can you do as an individual to increase youth engagement within your country in the political life?

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