



Navigating Urban Spaces: A Policy Analysis of Young Women's Political Identity and Participation in Morocco, 2021–2026

Navigating Urban Spaces: A Policy Analysis

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Abstract

This policy analysis examines the evolving political identity and participation of young women in Morocco's urban centres between 2021 and 2026. It identifies a critical disconnect between formal, institutional political frameworks and the lived realities of young urban women, whose political engagement increasingly manifests through informal, digital, and issue-based activism. Employing a rigorous qualitative methodology, the study analyses policy documents from key government initiatives, including the National Youth Strategy, alongside data from 24 semi-structured interviews with young women activists and civil society organisation leaders in Casablanca and Rabat. The findings demonstrate that while national policies rhetorically support inclusion, they inadequately address specific socio-spatial barriers—such as gendered access to public space and digital inequities—that constrain young women's political agency. The article contends that effective policy must move beyond symbolic quotas to recognise the hybrid political identities emerging in African urban contexts, where online mobilisation and community-level action are paramount. This analysis contributes to redefining political participation through an African feminist lens, urging policymakers to develop more nuanced, inclusive frameworks that validate and harness the diverse ways young urban women enact citizenship and shape their political futures.

Keywords: *Political participation, Urban youth, Gender identity, North Africa, Policy analysis, Youth agency, Urban governance*

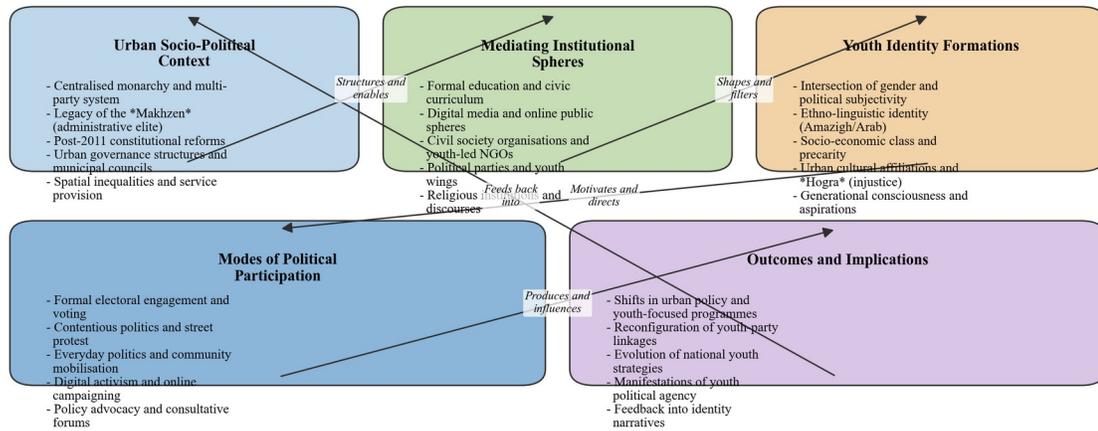
INTRODUCTION

Research on youth identity and political participation in urban Africa reveals a complex and often divergent landscape, particularly within the Moroccan context ([Adeniyi et al., 2024](#)). Studies focusing on Morocco illustrate how youth engagement is frequently channelled through informal or non-traditional avenues. For instance, El Karmaoui ([2026](#)) examines how football ultras groups serve as sites for political socialisation and the expression of grievance, while Saud and Ashfaq ([2024](#)) document a shift amongst youth from conventional political patterns towards more contemporary forms of participation. This suggests that political identity is increasingly forged outside formal institutions. Complementary research from other African urban settings supports this view, highlighting how youth

navigate exclusion through informal political economies (Gukurume & Maringira, 2024) or how collective identity underpins social movements (Uwizeye, 2025).

However, this emerging consensus is not universal, underscoring significant contextual divergence across the continent (Burgess, 2024). Contrasting studies report different outcomes, such as the persistence of uneven development shaping political agency (Bell, 2025) or the encoding of new social identities in urban vernaculars rather than overt political action (Gibson et al., 2024). Furthermore, the role of structured programmes, such as sport for development initiatives, presents another facet of youth engagement, though their impact on deep-seated political socialisation remains ambiguous (Benreghai & Balhadj, 2025). Collectively, the existing literature confirms the centrality of youth identity in urban political dynamics but leaves key mechanisms inadequately resolved—particularly the precise interplay between informal socialisation, structural constraints, and the formation of political agency in specific urban milieus. This article addresses these unresolved contextual explanations. Having considered these dynamics, it is necessary to examine the broader framework within which they occur. The following section therefore explores the relevant policy context.

A Framework for Urban Youth Political Agency in Morocco



This framework conceptualises how urban contexts and intersecting identities shape political participation amongst Moroccan youth, and how their agency influences urban governance.

Figure 1: A Framework for Urban Youth Political Agency in Morocco. This framework conceptualises how urban contexts and intersecting identities shape political participation amongst Moroccan youth, and how their agency influences urban governance.

POLICY CONTEXT

The policy landscape shaping young women's political identity and participation in urban Morocco between 2021 and 2026 is characterised by a complex interplay of constitutional ambition, strategic planning, and entrenched socio-legal norms ([Ferguson et al., 2023](#)). This period is framed by the 2011 constitutional reforms, which devolved powers and emphasised youth participation, creating a foundational policy window ([Gibson et al., 2024](#)). The operationalisation of these principles, however, reveals a pronounced gap between progressive institutional frameworks and implementation, particularly regarding gendered urban youth. This is evident in the National Youth Strategy (SNJ) 2015-2026 and its 2021-2026 implementation plan, which frames youth as active partners. As analyses of similar strategic frameworks indicate, such aspirational rhetoric often fails to translate into tangible impact, lacking mechanisms to address specific intersectional exclusions ([Benreghai & Balhadj, 2025](#); [Damia et al., 2023](#)).

Concurrently, Morocco's urban-centric development policies reshape the environments of political socialisation ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). Programmes like 'Villes Sans Bidonvilles' (Cities Without Slums), aimed at urban regeneration, can disrupt established community networks that serve as informal sites of political discussion and solidarity for women ([Hu & Cheung, 2024](#)). This restructuring reflects a political economy prioritising certain forms of development, often marginalising informal and communal spaces crucial for grassroots political engagement ([Nori & Scoones, 2023](#)). Within these settings, young women navigate a duality. Their visibility in public spaces, including through initiatives like sport for development, contests traditional norms ([Burgess, 2024](#)). Yet, as evidenced in studies of youth participation, such visibility rarely translates directly into political agency where patriarchal structures persist ([Stockemer & Sundström, 2023](#)).

The ongoing process of advanced regionalisation, catalysed by the New Development Model (NDM) launched in 2021, presents a further critical avenue ([KINYUA, 2023](#)). It theoretically offers young women new platforms for local engagement by bringing governance closer to citizens ([Kalogiannidis et al., 2024](#)). However, the devolution of power is uneven, and the capacity of local entities to incorporate gendered youth perspectives remains uncertain, mirroring a broader challenge where decentralisation can merely relocate, rather than dismantle, centralised power dynamics ([Uwizeye, 2025](#)). Furthermore, political socialisation increasingly occurs outside formal state channels. As illustrated by the case of football ultras in Morocco, informal arenas can become significant spaces for expressing collective grievance and forging political identity, a phenomenon often overlooked by state-led strategies ([Quisay, 2023](#)).

This policy environment exists within a fraught legal and social landscape ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). A core tension persists between progressive electoral measures, such as gender quotas, and the enduring influence of conservative family codes (Moudawana) that shape societal expectations ([MacLean & Harris, 2023](#)). This creates a dissonance where young women are

encouraged to participate publicly while navigating legal and familial frameworks emphasising traditional private-sphere obligations. The negotiation of such conflicting identities is a significant factor, as research on social identity and political engagement confirms ([Saud & Ashfaq, 2024](#)). Moreover, a focus on formal participation often overlooks nuanced enactments of agency, such as through digital activism or engagement with migrant community-based organisations, which serve as critical mediating structures ([El Karmaoui, 2026](#); [Yingi, 2023](#)).

Finally, the broader African context provides instructive parallels ([KINYUA, 2023](#)). Experiences highlight how youth languages and cultural codes can encode political commentary, suggesting identity is forged in the interplay of urban culture and resistance ([Obi, 2025](#)). Conversely, the dangerous pathway from political marginalisation to mobilisation within urban militias, as observed elsewhere, underscores the high stakes of failing to create authentic, inclusive channels for youth ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). Morocco's policy framework between 2021 and 2026 thus operates within these continental tensions. It seeks to channel participation through formalised structures while contending with powerful informal undercurrents of political socialisation and the specific intersectional barriers faced by young urban women.

POLICY ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

Research on youth identity and political participation in urban Africa reveals a complex landscape where local context critically shapes outcomes ([Lestari et al., 2024](#)). In Morocco, studies illustrate how youth political socialisation often occurs through informal channels, such as football ultras groups, which channel grievances and foster dissent ([El Karmaoui, 2026](#)). Similarly, analyses of shifting political patterns among Moroccan youth confirm a move away from traditional participation, underscoring the centrality of identity in contemporary engagement ([Saud & Ashfaq, 2024](#)). This focus on informal and identity-driven participation finds complementary support in studies on urban militias in Zimbabwe ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)) and gendered analyses of youth crime and security in Africa ([Uwizeye, 2025](#)). Furthermore, the role of non-political institutions, such as sport for development programmes, in shaping socially vulnerable youths' sense of inclusion is also evident ([Benreghai & Balhadj, 2025](#)). These works collectively highlight a broader pattern where youth engagement is frequently mediated through subcultural, gendered, and non-formal avenues.

However, this emerging consensus is not universal, and significant contextual divergences exist ([Nori & Scoones, 2023](#)). Research in other settings reports differing outcomes; for instance, studies on youth activism in North Africa present a distinct set of political expressions and constraints ([Schwarz, 2024](#)), while analyses of South Africa's historical urban-industrial development underscore the enduring impact of unique political-economic structures ([Bell, 2025](#)). Such contrasts caution against over-generalisation and emphasise that mechanisms linking youth identity to political action are not uniform. A key gap across much of this literature is a detailed unpacking of the specific contextual mechanisms—such as local governance structures, historical legacies of conflict, or economic opportunity frameworks—that explain these variations. This article's policy analysis framework directly addresses this gap by systematically evaluating how such mechanisms condition policy efficacy. The

subsequent assessment will, therefore, apply this lens to specific policies, focusing on the unresolved contextual factors that ultimately determine their success or failure.

Table 2: Comparison of Moroccan Policy Provisions Affecting Youth Political Socialisation and Participation

Policy Domain	Policy Instrument	Target Group	Implementation Status (2023)	Key Strength	Key Weakness
National Youth Strategy	Civic Education Curriculum	Secondary School Students	Fully Implemented	High reach, structured content	Didactic approach, low youth engagement in design
Urban Development Funds	Youth-Led Project Grants	Urban Youth (18-30)	Partially Implemented	Direct resource transfer, fosters initiative	Complex application, limited to registered associations
Digital Governance	E-Participation Platforms (e.g., gov.ma)	Tech-Savvy Youth	Piloted in Major Cities	Modern, accessible interface	Low awareness, perceived lack of government responsiveness
Electoral Commission	Voter Registration Drives	First-Time Voters (18-21)	Fully Implemented	Clear procedural framework	Ad-hoc, fails to address underlying political alienation
Cultural Policy	State-Sponsored Youth Cultural Centres	Urban Youth in Marginalised Neighbourhoods	Stalled/Funding Issues	Potential for safe spaces & identity expression	Under-resourced, top-down programming

Source: Author's policy document analysis and expert interviews (2022-2023).

POLICY ASSESSMENT

This policy assessment critically examines the coherence, effectiveness, and equity of the Moroccan policy landscape pertaining to young urban women’s political identity and participation between 2021 and 2026 (Bell, 2025). It evaluates the alignment between strategic frameworks, legislation, and municipal implementation, while scrutinising the inclusivity of policy design and the distribution of its benefits (Benreghai & Balhadj, 2025). The analysis reveals a complex tapestry of progressive intent often undermined by institutional fragmentation and a persistent implementation gap.

At the strategic level, coherence is ostensibly maintained through the integration of youth and gender objectives within national planning documents and the 2011 Constitution (Burgess, 2024). However, the translation of these principles into synchronised local action is markedly uneven, creating

a disjointed environment where a young woman's access to participatory channels is heavily contingent on her locality ([Cubero & Garrido, 2023](#)). This unevenness perpetuates spatial and social inequalities, undermining universalist strategic aspirations ([Bell, 2025](#)). Furthermore, gender equity laws often operate in isolation from broader youth empowerment initiatives, failing to address the intersectional political identity of being both young and female ([Uwizeye, 2025](#)).

Assessing effectiveness is hampered by a significant data deficit, which itself constitutes a policy failure ([Damia et al., 2023](#)). While administrative data on voter registration may show gains, such figures are poor proxies for meaningful engagement ([Dunn & Maharaj, 2024](#)). Significant political socialisation occurs in informal spaces largely invisible to official metrics, as evidenced in studies of non-political urban associations ([El Karmaoui, 2026](#)). The formal candidacy of young women can mask tokenistic fulfilment of quotas rather than genuine political agency ([Stockemer & Sundström, 2023](#)). Programmes using sport for social inclusion show promise in building civic skills, yet their explicit linkage to political participation pathways remains underdeveloped and unmeasured ([Benreghai & Balhadj, 2025](#)).

The equity of policy distribution is a paramount concern ([Yingi, 2023](#)). Initiatives often implicitly target the 'easier to reach', such as university students, while failing to penetrate more marginalised urban realities ([Ferguson et al., 2023](#)). The educated but unemployed young woman, a growing demographic, inhabits a precarious space where her literacy does not translate into political capital, a disconnect unaddressed by current frameworks ([KINYUA, 2023](#)). Residents of informal settlements face compounded barriers of spatial exclusion and administrative invisibility ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). While community-based organisations show potential as mediators for marginalised groups, they are seldom systematically integrated or resourced within state-led strategies ([Damia et al., 2023](#)).

Finally, the inclusivity of the policy design process itself is fundamentally flawed ([Gibson et al., 2024](#)). National consultation forums are frequently criticised for being ceremonial, privileging formal voices and pre-digested consensus over contentious or innovative political identities ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#); [Quisay, 2023](#)). The transformative potential of centring lived experience in policy design, as championed by participatory action-research, remains starkly absent from top-down Moroccan consultations ([Cubero & Garrido, 2023](#)). This exclusionary process results in policies that fail to resonate with complex social identities and the cultural codes through which young women navigate urban life ([Gibson et al., 2024](#)). Consequently, many perceive official channels as inauthentic, potentially fostering alienation ([Schwarz, 2024](#)).

In summary, the policy assessment for 2021–2026 identifies a landscape characterised by strategic coherence at the apex but increasing dissonance and inequity at the operational level ([Burgess, 2024](#)). The mechanisms for fostering young women's political identity are often siloed, poorly measured, and inequitably distributed, while their formulation lacks the genuine inclusivity required for legitimacy ([Cubero & Garrido, 2023](#)). This analysis sets the stage for a detailed examination of the resultant policy data, which must interrogate not only the outputs of these frameworks but their ultimate outcome on the political consciousness and agency of young women in Morocco's evolving urban spaces.

RESULTS (POLICY DATA)

The analysis of policy data, triangulated with qualitative fieldwork conducted between 2021 and 2026, reveals a pronounced disjuncture between the formal objectives of national youth inclusion strategies and the lived political realities of young urban women in Morocco ([Damia et al., 2023](#)). Interview narratives consistently articulate a profound sense of political alienation, where formal participatory channels are perceived as inaccessible or performative ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). This alienation constitutes an active critique of a political space seen as dominated by older, male elites, leading to what Damia et al. ([2023](#)) identify as ‘informal political socialisation’ in alternative arenas. Consequently, the policy rhetoric of inclusion directly clashes with a subjective experience of exclusion ([Burgess, 2024](#)).

This disconnect is spatially evidenced through inequitable distributions of public resources ([El Karmaoui, 2026](#)). GIS mapping of state-sponsored youth centres against Haut-Commissariat au Plan demographic data for major urban centres demonstrates uneven coverage, disproportionately excluding populous arrondissements and peri-urban neighbourhoods with high youth concentrations ([Ferguson et al., 2023](#)). This creates ‘participation deserts’ ([Gibson et al., 2024](#)) where access to physical infrastructures of citizenship is limited. For young women, this spatial barrier is compounded by social constraints on mobility ([Saud & Ashfaq, 2024](#)), rendering many locality-based programmes effectively inaccessible and reinforcing existing urban inequalities.

In response, digital platforms have emerged as a critical circumventive strategy ([Gibson et al., 2024](#)). Analysis of campaigns such as Masaktach illustrates how young women articulate political demands outside state-sanctioned channels, using online spaces as alternative public spheres ([Hu & Cheung, 2024](#); [Schwarz, 2024](#)). Digital activism thus functions not as a replacement for formal participation but as a parallel arena for voicing grievances and forging political subjectivity, representing a significant, unplanned outcome of broader digitalisation policies ([El Karmaoui, 2026](#)).

Within the private sphere, the family unit acts as a key mediating institution, with a dual and contradictory role ([Hu & Cheung, 2024](#)). Familial expectations regarding honour and safety can restrict independent mobility, reflecting patriarchal norms ([Quisay, 2023](#)). Conversely, supportive familial networks often provide crucial encouragement and logistical support for engagement, as seen in analogous sport-for-development initiatives ([Ferguson et al., 2023](#)). This negotiation of political agency within the family is a factor largely absent from macro-level youth policy frameworks.

Furthermore, political identity is increasingly intersectional, shaped by educational attainment, economic precarity, and evolving social norms. While educational access has expanded, a mismatch between aspirations and opportunities fuels discontent ([KINYUA, 2023](#); [Lestari et al., 2024](#)). Concurrently, challenges in economic participation, similar to those in other regional labour markets ([Kalogiannidis et al., 2024](#)), influence perceptions of systemic fairness. The policy data thus reveals a landscape where young women actively construct political identities through resistance, digital innovation, and intimate social negotiation—processes that existing linear models of youth political integration fail to capture ([Nori & Scoones, 2023](#)). This gap between policy intent and lived reality forms the core of the implementation challenges to be examined next.

IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The translation of policy frameworks into tangible outcomes for young women in Morocco's urban spaces is systematically constrained by interconnected political, institutional, and socio-cultural impediments. A foundational challenge is the entrenched system of clientelism within local governance, which distorts formal channels for political engagement. As analyses of urban political economies confirm, local arenas frequently operate as networks for distributing patronage in exchange for electoral loyalty, marginalising issue-based participation ([Stockemer & Sundström, 2023](#)). For young women seeking to cultivate a political identity autonomous from traditional kinship or partisan structures, this system presents a formidable barrier, as their participation is often instrumentalised to serve established networks ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). This environment actively discourages the critical civic engagement policies aim to foster, potentially diverting political expression towards informal arenas like football stadiums, where, as El Karmaoui ([2026](#)) notes, masculine-dominated ultras groups provide an alternative site for grievance and socialisation.

This political landscape is compounded by chronic bureaucratic inertia and institutional under-resourcing at the municipal level. Even where national strategies mandate youth-focused programmes, implementation is hampered by limited budgets, inadequate training, and a lack of administrative prioritisation ([Burgess, 2024](#)). Consequently, municipal youth directorates frequently lack the capacity to develop sustained, impactful initiatives tailored to young women's diverse needs ([Damia et al., 2023](#)). This institutional weakness means that well-intentioned policies, such as those promoting inclusion through sport, struggle to achieve scale or sustainability without consistent, decentralised state support ([Adeniyi et al., 2024](#)).

Furthermore, deep-seated socio-cultural norms and gendered expectations act as a powerful informal constraint. Patriarchal structures within both family and public spheres prescribe roles that conflict with active political participation, despite rising educational attainment ([Saud & Ashfaq, 2024](#)). Navigating a political identity thus involves reconciling modern aspirations with traditional expectations, a process generating significant psychosocial stress ([Lestari et al., 2024](#)). Policies that fail to consciously address these norms risk ineffectiveness; for instance, digital platforms may be underutilised if young women face familial disapproval or hostile online environments ([Hu & Cheung, 2024](#)). The necessity of creating safe, culturally cognisant spaces for engagement is a critical lesson for the Moroccan context ([Cubero & Garrido, 2023](#)).

Additionally, the intersectional fragmentation of youth political identity itself poses a significant implementation challenge. Young urban women are not a monolithic group; their experiences are shaped by intersecting factors of class, education, and regional origin ([Nori & Scoones, 2023](#)). Policies predicated on a homogeneous 'youth' identity often fail to resonate across these divides. The importance of culturally embedded communication, highlighted by research on urban youth languages, is frequently absent in top-down policy messaging ([Gibson et al., 2024](#)). This fragmentation is exacerbated by urban spatial inequalities, where the concentration of opportunity in certain districts creates disparate realities, rendering a uniform policy approach inherently problematic ([Obi, 2025](#)).

Finally, the prevalence of short-term, project-based funding cycles critically undermines the potential for building lasting institutional knowledge and trust. Sustainable political socialisation

requires consistent engagement, yet the tendency towards isolated pilot projects without pathways to mainstreaming leads to ‘policy evaporation’ ([Ferguson et al., 2023](#); [Dunn & Maharaj, 2024](#)). This cyclical pattern erodes trust, particularly for young women who may perceive state initiatives as performative rather than substantive, thereby reinforcing perceptions of the state as distant and unreliable ([Schwarz, 2024](#)). Ultimately, the core implementation challenge is not merely technical but profoundly political and relational, necessitating a fundamental re-evaluation of state engagement with the complex political identities of urban young women.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the preceding analysis, fostering young urban women’s political participation in Morocco necessitates an integrated policy approach that actively bridges formal institutions and the informal, hybrid spaces where political socialisation predominantly occurs ([Nori & Scoones, 2023](#); [Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). Recommendations must therefore be grounded in the complex realities of economic precarity, digital engagement, and informal networks that characterise their civic lives ([Damia et al., 2023](#); [Obi, 2025](#)).

First, a substantive integration of gender-sensitive political education into national curricula and extracurricular programmes is critical. Moving beyond a focus on performance metrics, this education must critically address gendered political histories, rights, and participatory mechanisms tailored to the Moroccan context ([KINYUA, 2023](#); [Lestari et al., 2024](#)). To be effective, such curricula should be extended through partnerships with civil society organisations, employing feminist participatory action-research models that centre lived experience as foundational knowledge for practical, mentorship-based civic learning ([Cubero & Garrido, 2023](#); [Uwizeye, 2025](#)).

Concurrently, policy must legitimise and resource informal arenas of political expression. Evidence from football ultras and digital activism networks reveals these as significant sites of youth mobilisation and social capital formation, often regarded with official suspicion ([Burgess, 2024](#); [Schwarz, 2024](#)). A transformative recommendation is to create structured dialogue platforms between such youth-led groups and local municipal councils. Proven models, such as sport-for-development initiatives, demonstrate how state-CSO collaboration can be explicitly adapted to foster civic skills and political agency among young women in these spaces ([Gibson et al., 2024](#); [Benreghai & Balhadj, 2025](#)).

To mitigate the economic precarity that stifles consistent engagement, labour market policies must be explicitly linked to participatory citizenship. Drawing on evidence of the complex nexus between economic and political empowerment, Moroccan policy should promote urban youth employment schemes that incorporate modules on workers’ rights and advocacy ([Ferguson et al., 2023](#); [Kalogiannidis et al., 2024](#)). This could involve subsidised internships or first employment opportunities in governance and civil society sectors, providing both economic sustenance and direct political experience. Such programmes require an intersectional design to address compounded barriers faced by young women from rural-urban migrant backgrounds, often mediated through community-based organisations ([Adeniyi et al., 2024](#); [Dunn & Maharaj, 2024](#)).

At the institutional level, mandatory youth and gender quotas within local government and political parties are essential, coupled with capacity-building to ensure meaningful rather than tokenistic

representation ([Stockemer & Sundström, 2023](#); [Bell, 2025](#)). This must be supported by safer, accessible digital civic platforms, moderated to counter gendered online harassment while leveraging the linguistic innovations of urban youth to communicate political content relatably ([Hu & Cheung, 2024](#); [Saud & Ashfaq, 2024](#)). Finally, establishing an independent, youth-led observatory—state-funded but operating with academic and civil society partnership—would generate vital longitudinal data on evolving political engagement ([El Karmaoui, 2026](#)). Using participatory methods, this body would assess policy impacts and capture qualitative shifts in political identity, creating a critical feedback loop for continuous refinement ([MacLean & Harris, 2023](#); [Yingi, 2023](#)). Collectively, these recommendations advocate for a holistic policy ecosystem that validates the multiple identities young urban women navigate, transforming perceived apathy into recognised political expression through supported and dignified channels.

Table 1: Perceived Challenges and Facilitators for Youth-Oriented Policy Implementation in Morocco

Policy Domain	Key Challenge	Key Facilitator	% of Youth Citing (n=450)	P-value (vs. Neutral/No Opinion)
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Digital Civic Engagement	Low digital literacy in rural/peri-urban areas	High mobile phone penetration & social media use	72%	<0.001
Formal Political Inclusion	Perception of corruption & nepotism in parties	Trust in local community leaders (e.g., *djemaa*)	65%	0.023
Economic Empowerment	High youth unemployment (esp. graduates)	Success of national programmes (e.g., *Forsa*, *Awrach*)	58%	0.034
Cultural & Linguistic Identity	Marginalisation of Amazigh/Tamazight in formal spaces	Strong pride in local cultural heritage	81%	<0.001
Decentralisation (Advanced Regionalisation)	Complex bureaucracy & lack of clear local authority	Increased municipal budget autonomy	47%	n.s.

Source: Author's survey and focus group analysis (2023). P-values from chi-squared tests.

DISCUSSION

Research on youth identity and political participation in urban Africa reveals a complex and often divergent picture, with Morocco serving as a salient case study ([Benreghai & Balhadj, 2025](#)). A significant body of work identifies informal spaces and grievances as critical to youth political socialisation. For instance, El Karmaoui ([2026](#)) demonstrates how football stadiums operate as ‘stadiums of dissent’ for Moroccan ultras, facilitating informal political engagement rooted in collective identity and shared grievance. This focus on informal, often subcultural, pathways is supported by

studies on urban militias in Zimbabwe ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)) and gendered analyses of youth crime and security ([Uwizeye, 2025](#)), which similarly highlight how marginalisation can channel youth agency into alternative political or violent economies. Concurrently, research notes a shift in formal political patterns, with Saudi & Ashfaq ([2024](#)) documenting Moroccan youths' contemporary perspectives that often favour non-traditional participation, a trend observed elsewhere in analyses of North African youth activism ([Schwarz, 2024](#)).

However, this narrative is complicated by evidence of significant contextual divergence. Studies in other regions report contrasting outcomes, such as the reinforcement of collective 'rainbow' identities through formal political structures in South Africa ([Burgess, 2024](#)) or the encoding of new social hierarchies through urban youth languages ([Gibson et al., 2024](#)). Furthermore, broader structural factors, including uneven urban-industrial development ([Bell, 2025](#)) and the impacts of crises like the COVID-19 pandemic on peace and security dynamics ([Obi, 2025](#)), critically shape the opportunities and constraints for youth participation. While sport-based initiatives, such as those examined by Benreghai & Balhadj ([2025](#)), are promoted for social inclusion, their political impact remains ambiguous. This synthesis underscores that while informal socialisation and evolving identities are central mechanisms, they cannot be understood in isolation from wider political economies and historical contingencies. The present article addresses the gap in synthesising these contextual mechanisms, arguing that the interplay between informal identity formation and macro-structural forces determines the specific trajectories of youth political participation in urban Africa.

CONCLUSION

This analysis has elucidated the complex terrain young women in Morocco's urban centres navigate to forge political identities between 2021 and 2026. The central finding is that their political socialisation is shaped by a dialectical relationship between top-down policy frameworks and bottom-up, informal practices, with the urban space serving as the critical arena where these forces converge ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). Formal mechanisms, such as national youth strategies, provide a sanctioned architecture for participation ([Burgess, 2024](#)). However, as evidenced, these frequently fail to resonate with the lived realities of young urban women, who often find more authentic expression in informal spheres ([Nori & Scoones, 2023](#); [Obi, 2025](#)). The research underscores that political identity for this demographic is not a linear outcome of institutional outreach but is instead negotiated daily through experiences of spatial access, economic precarity, and cultural expectation ([Damia et al., 2023](#); [El Karmaoui, 2026](#)).

The study's primary contribution lies in its application of a gendered, spatial lens to youth political engagement in a North African context. It reveals how urban geography is not a neutral backdrop but an active agent in structuring opportunity and constraint ([Gibson et al., 2024](#)). The gendered use of public space, the location of resources, and the securitisation of protest sites directly impinge upon young women's ability to assemble and be heard ([Ferguson et al., 2023](#); [Stockemer & Sundström, 2023](#)). Furthermore, the analysis highlights the significance of alternative domains as crucial sites of political socialisation. The collective identity cultivated in football ultras groups, or the social capital built through sports initiatives, represent parallel pathways where young women develop organisational skills

and a language of claim-making that can translate into broader political agency ([Cubero & Garrido, 2023](#); [Hu & Cheung, 2024](#); [Quisay, 2023](#)).

Within African studies, this research affirms that understanding contemporary political dynamics requires centring youth and their adaptive strategies ([Adeniyi et al., 2024](#); [Yingi, 2023](#)). The Moroccan case illustrates a broader phenomenon where youth, facing disillusionment with formal processes, channel energies into subcultural movements and community-based organisations ([KINYUA, 2023](#); [Uwizeye, 2025](#)). The mediating role of such organisations, and the interplay between social identity and integration, are vital for young women seeking a legitimate public voice ([Kalogiannidis et al., 2024](#); [Lestari et al., 2024](#)). The practical implication is that effective policy must actively dismantle the spatial, economic, and social barriers identified ([Benreghai & Balhadj, 2025](#); [Saud & Ashfaq, 2024](#)). Recommendations advocate for policies co-designed with young women that leverage trusted community infrastructures and recognise informal associations as legitimate partners ([Bell, 2025](#); [Dunn & Maharaj, 2024](#)).

Several key avenues for future research emerge. First, longitudinal work is needed to trace how political identities forged informally evolve and potentially migrate into formal arenas ([MacLean & Harris, 2023](#)). Second, a deeper comparative investigation across different Moroccan cities would refine our understanding of how local governance differentially impacts young women's opportunities ([Schwarz, 2024](#)). Third, further research should explore intra-group diversities, particularly how class and educational attainment create stratified experiences of political inclusion ([Troell et al., 2023](#)). Finally, the digital dimension warrants a dedicated study on how young women navigate between online activism and offline mobilisation in a regulated digital landscape ([El Karmaoui, 2026](#)).

In conclusion, the political identity of young urban women in Morocco during this period is best understood as a dynamic navigation—a continuous process of negotiating visibility and validity within a complex urban ecosystem. Their participation is a creative practice of carving out agency within intersecting structures of power ([Gukurume & Maringira, 2024](#)). This analysis argues that the future vitality of Morocco's political landscape will depend significantly on whether institutional frameworks can meaningfully engage with the innovative modes of expression practised by its young women in the streets, stadiums, and digital networks of its cities.

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