

The Civil Society, the Commune, the Parliament: strategies for political promotion of young rural leaders in the province of El Hajeb, Morocco¹.

La sociedad civil, la comuna, el parlamento: estrategias para la promoción política de jóvenes líderes rurales en la provincia de El Hajeb, Marruecos.

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Abstract

Bearing in mind that elections are an auspicious time to raise local political issues, this article analyses the strategies of young men and women leaders in the province of El Hajeb in Morocco and how they negotiate their leadership roles at the local level. The article is based on observations and semi-structured interviews conducted with young leaders and resource

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holders during the legislative elections of October 2016. While some young people manage to access municipal councils, the present authors find evidence to suggest that they cannot become parliamentarians because of being hampered by a lack of social networks that would broaden their constituency, as well as a lack of material resources to run their election campaigns. For young women, access to parliament is even more difficult, particularly if they fail to obtain a seat through the women's quota system. Conscious of their limited resources, some young people consider the electoral period as a resource in itself for asserting themselves at the local level and negotiating their political rise. In parallel, they develop electoral strategies to position themselves as local leaders without necessarily running as candidates in legislative elections by choosing to: a) go through several local and regional elective structures; b) strengthen their position within any political party; c) get involved for many years in associational work while attempting to move upwards from the territory of their village to the commune, and then to the province; and d) draw on family notability. The authors' aim is to show that young leaders are not instrumentalised by potential elected representatives but that they carefully negotiate the support they provide to such representatives in order to consolidate their local leadership.

Keywords: Young leaders/ political participation/ elections/ rural areas/ Morocco/

Resumen

Teniendo en cuenta que las elecciones son un momento propicio para plantear cuestiones políticas locales, este artículo analiza las estrategias de los jóvenes líderes, hombres y mujeres, de la provincia de El Hajeb, en Marruecos, y cómo negocian sus funciones de liderazgo a nivel local. Este artículo se basa en observaciones y entrevistas semiestructuradas realizadas a jóvenes líderes y especialistas durante las elecciones legislativas de octubre de 2016. Si bien algunos jóvenes logran acceder a los consejos municipales, ilustramos que no pueden convertirse en parlamentarios debido a la falta de una red social que amplíe su circunscripción, así como a la falta de recursos materiales para llevar a cabo su campaña electoral. Para las mujeres jóvenes, el acceso al parlamento es aún más difícil, en particular si no obtienen un escaño mediante el sistema de cuotas para mujeres. Conscientes de sus recursos limitados, algunos jóvenes consideran el momento electoral como un recurso en sí mismo para afirmarse a nivel local y negociar su ascenso político. Paralelamente, desarrollan estrategias electorales para posicionarse como líderes locales sin presentarse necesariamente como candidatos a las elecciones legislativas, eligiendo: a) pasar por varias estructuras electivas locales y regionales; b) reforzar su posición dentro de cualquier partido político; c) involucrarse durante muchos años en el trabajo asociativo mientras intentan ascender del territorio de su pueblo a la comuna, a la provincia; y d) recurrir a la notabilidad familiar. Nuestro objetivo es demostrar que los jóvenes dirigentes no son instrumentalizados por los posibles representantes electos, sino que negocian cuidadosamente el apoyo que les brindan para consolidar su liderazgo local.

Palabras clave: jóvenes líderes/ participación política/ elecciones/ zonas rurales/ Marruecos/

Introduction

The debates surrounding the political participation of young people have taken on a significant dimension since the 2011 events referred to as the "Arab Spring". Many international organisations have taken actions to encourage the political participation of young people (Desrués and Velasco, 2019). In 2013, for example, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) released a report entitled "Enhancing Youth Political Participation throughout the Electoral Cycle".

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The report articulated a “2014-2017 Youth Strategy”, with the purpose of strengthening youth participation in political life and public institutions (IPU, 2014).

As far as Morocco is concerned, all studies are unanimous about the low level of youth participation, as confirmed by the official turnout rates in recent elections. Some studies account for this fact by arguing that youth engagement is real but may be expressed in different ways, contrasting traditional forms of politicisation, such as involvement in civil society, with involvement in street protests as well as advocacy movements (Bono, 2013), or even in social networks. The emergence of youth protest movements dates back to the 1960s. Since then, there have been historical sequences of confrontation with the central political power.

It should also be pointed out that the indirect politicisation of young people is also due to the political system in Morocco, which is characterised by the low confidence of citizens in political parties and elected representatives. Political power in Morocco is characterised by the way it centres around the monarchy, a highly fragmented partisan landscape and an electoral architecture that makes it impossible to have a clearwinning political majority. Admittedly, political reforms have been adopted since 1996 with the aim of strengthening the rule of law. As a result, the constitution has been amended to allow for the appointment of a government called the “alternance”, led by a coalition of opposition political parties. Subsequently, the accession to the throne of the new king, Mohamed VI, in 1999 had a further impact on the way elections are organised, with safeguards regarding their transparency. Lastly, a new constitution was drawn up in the wake of the 2011 protest movement.

This movement, known as the “February 20 movement”, reflecting a widespread feeling of humiliation, was led especially by urban youths in distress, who lacked confidence in the existing institutions and the political elite (Allal and Pierret, 2013; Desrues, 2012; Hibou, 2011). Young people questioned the governance systems and political forces in place, and even called for the departure of the regime’s leaders (Bonneyoy and Catusse, 2013; Bennani-Chraïbi and Jekhally, 2012; Desrues and González, 2019a and b). The “February 20 movement” forced the implementation of new public policies. State programmes were introduced to encourage and facilitate youth participation. A quota of seats was reserved for youth in the 2011 legislative elections (García de Paredes, 2017) and a “parallel” youth government was symbolically formed to respond to these demands. Even so, public policies dedicated to young people failed to account for the specificities of the rural youth, who remained closely linked to agricultural production systems and an economic environment and infrastructure that can be globally characterised as more fragile than those available to city dwellers. The rural youth are not well supported by public policies that seem to cater more for their urban counterparts. Social scientists have clearly documented that the “Arab Spring” arose in rural areas (Gana, 2013; Ayeb, 2011), but it was not until 2020 that the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development made the issue of the rural youth one of the main priorities guiding Morocco’s new agricultural strategy, *Génération Green* (Green Generation), launched in February 2020.

Despite a growing interest in the rural youth (Gastineau and Golaz, 2016; Amichi et al., 2015; Chauveau, 2005), the topic of this population category’s political participation has been poorly addressed by the social and political sciences². Studies have emphasised the ability of the rural youth to initiate collective action, notably by getting involved in local politics through development projects (Abdellaoui et al., 2015), local micro-bureaucracies (Chauveau, 2005) or youth associations leading to cultural, educational and environmental development (Bahri et al., 2019). They show that even when young leaders in rural areas are supported by public authorities,

² Books and journal issues on youth political participation in North Africa are scarce. Of those published, none addresses to the present authors’ knowledge the specific issue of rural youth political participation in North Africa in general (Desrues and García de Paredes, 2019a) or in Morocco in particular (Desrues and Kirhlani 2013; Deau and Goeury, 2019; Zerhouni, 2019).

they compete with traditional leaders who fear radical change and loss of power (Fauroux, 1985; Kadiri and Errahj, 2015).

The interest in studying young people engaged in initiatives such as their commitment to municipal and legislative elections – or their resistance to the authority of longstanding leaders – has shed light on their local political involvement and their political repositioning within their localities (Kouassi, 2016). Recent research has shown that rural youth involvement facilitates access to political power at town, provincial and regional levels (e.g., the Regional Chamber of Agriculture) (Kadiri et al., 2015; Kadiri and Errahj, 2015). Even so, national legislative access beyond the 2011 quota³ remains problematic.

The assumption then is that the rural youth, even those described as local leaders, are absent from the political scene when it comes to legislative elections, and consequently the elections are dominated by more experienced politicians. The presence of young people becomes more apparent when considering how potential candidates for parliament call upon local elites for mediation in mobilising voters. Young people are among such elites, even if they are often subject to traditional notables or elected officials whose political careers are national and exceed the scope of a local constituency (Tamim and Tozy, 2010). The difficulty young people encounter in accessing parliament is not limited to rural areas, and applies equally to young people active in the peri-urban areas of major cities (Iraki, 2010).

The present authors' analysis will focus on how the rural youth develop long-term strategies for positioning themselves in preparation for standing in legislative elections and how they negotiate their leadership roles at the local level. The analysis will focus on both men and women. The authors' hypothesis is that despite women's low penchant for electoral politics, unlike their male counterparts, their participation remains committed and effective. Both young men and women negotiate the support they provide to the aforementioned elected representatives in order to build their own positions, consolidate their local leadership and accumulate new resources for future municipal and legislative elections.

Elections as an opportunity for observing political configurations

Let us consider the October 2016 legislative elections as a transformational moment for local political issues. The electoral manoeuvres that were to be observed began, as everywhere in Morocco, long before the official launch of the election campaign. The concept of configuration, as developed by N. Elias (2003), allows us to apprehend these young leaders according to the various configurations within which they operate and indeed, draw upon for their campaigns. This enables analysis of the various cross-generational relations between young leaders and their elders, more experienced leaders and legislative candidates, while paying particular attention to the nature of the relations into which these actors are inserted, as well as their degree of mutual interdependence.

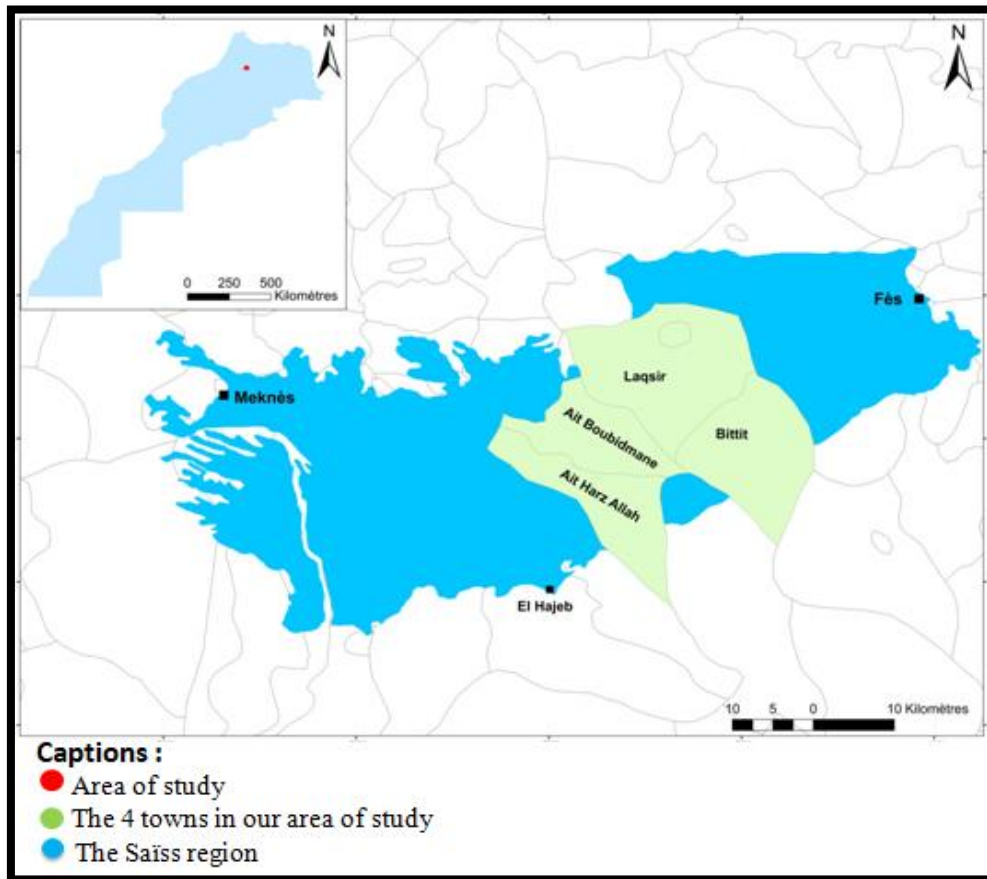
These relations are neither equal nor stable over time; they result in a variable equilibrium of power within the configuration, offering different degrees of freedom to the various actors and influencing their ability to act upon the configuration they have subscribed to (Carrié, n.d.). This is

³According to Article 1 of the Organic Law regarding the House of Representatives "90 members are elected under a national constituency created on the scale of the territory of the kingdom". This national list apportions 60 seats in the House of Representatives to women, and 30 to young people under 40.

consistent with the definition of leadership that the present authors adopt, whereby it is viewed as a reciprocal process of mobilising, by persons with certain motives and values, various economic, political, and other resources, in a context of competition and conflict, in order to achieve individual or shared goals held by both leaders and followers (McGregor Burns, 1978).

To analyse the positioning of young women and men in the 2016 legislative elections, the authors made several field trips in 2015, and again in 2016, one month before the launch of the official election campaign (which ran between September 24 and October 6), and then in October, after the campaign had ended. These observations are part of the authors' ongoing research in the study area focusing on the role of the rural youth in social and political changes as well as in the construction of new territorialities. The authors were thus able to follow the political negotiations that preceded the election and to study the involvement of young rural leaders before and during the election campaign. This methodological approach is based on direct observations of the various events of the campaign (handing out flyers, touring villages, ...), on a series of semi-structured interviews with resource holders (civil servants from the rural communities under study, civil society actors, former elected officials in their communities, etc.) and on the life stories of young leaders, namely 10 young men and five young women.

In this research, the authors considered as young any person who identified himself/herself as such or who was identified in his or her community as such. Our definition was therefore different from that widely used in political analysis of youth as a statistical category. Although it may seem useful to define youth by age range, particularly when comparing our results with official statistics and national census data, this approach would have been excessively restrictive in considering the case of the rural youth. Indeed, this category is very difficult to define exclusively on the basis of age (Rachik, 2007; Pascon and Bentaher, 1978). A leader might consider himself young and be considered young by his peers even when he/she is, for example, older than 40 (Kadiri et al., 2015). The young people we studied were involved to varying degrees, in state (municipal and/or provincial) and civil society elective bodies (associations/cooperatives/economic interest groups). Our subjects positioned themselves as local leaders within these entities and in every case self-identified as being young in relation to the older members in the above-mentioned elective bodies.

Figure 1. The location of the study area

The research area covered by the present study was located in the province of El Hajeb, more specifically within a circle formed by Ain Taoujdate and its four rural municipalities: Ait Boubidmane, Ait Harzellah, Bittit and Laqsir. The province elects two parliamentary seats. Agriculture is the main activity in the area and offers young people a favourable environment to benefit from numerous grants and opportunities launched under various development programmes such as the Plan Maroc Vert - PMV⁴(Plan for a Green Morocco) and the Initiative Nationale du Développement Humain – INDH⁵(National Initiative for Human Development). Young people were further involved in social and non-profit activities in which they played increasingly important roles. These structures assumed different forms: development associations, water users' associations (either for irrigation or drinking water), dairy cooperatives and produce-marketing cooperatives. Such initiatives expanded opportunities for the rural youth, encouraging territorial attachment and reinforcing their roles as community leaders (Kadiri et al., 2015).

Resources, strategies and young leaders' trajectories

Access to legislative leadership is described by young people as "more difficult" than access to communal leadership because it requires resources they do not have. Without financial resources,

⁴ This is the Moroccan agricultural development strategy between 2008-2019 (See Akesbi, 2009).

⁵ A project launched by the King of Morocco in 2005 and part of the social and economic development policy of Morocco (see Hibou and Tozy, 2015).

broad social networks, support from political parties or membership of notable families, young leaders "prefer to progress slowly" and to develop a long-term strategy.

Insufficient resources for a parliamentary career

Young leaders are aware of the difficulty of obtaining an elected position in parliament. In many countries, the representation of young men and women in national parliaments remains low, with most parliamentarians, men and women, aged between 51 and 60, and with a masculine majority (IPU, 2014). In addition, young people under the age of 30 represent less than 2% of the world's parliamentarians (IPU, 2016). Furthermore, in Morocco, only 9% of the population aged between 18 to 24 is registered to vote, whereas their age cohort in 2007 represented 24% of the electorate (Desrues and López García, 2008). Young people are realistic and prefer either to postpone or to give up the idea of running for parliamentary elections. Instead, they prefer to try their luck in municipal or professional elections such as those of the Chamber of Agriculture. Such options are viewed as more within their reach.

Some of the young people the authors met justify their decision by a lack of experience in political work:

"For the moment, I'm not thinking about legislative elections, but it's just a matter of time. Because to run in these elections, you must be known throughout the province. It is not a question of will but rather of means. Ambitions are not lacking but when you are a beginner in politics ["jdidfssiyassa"] it's difficult. I have only been involved in politics for seven years, it is not long enough" Khalid⁶ (46), elected in Ait Harzellah.

In addition to a general lack of experience, they also lack resources which, in their eyes, are essential in order to hold a seat in parliament. They need both financial resources and a strong network of relationships; in other words, they need to develop economic and social capital.

Young people mention the availability of financial resources as a necessary condition for conducting a successful electoral campaign and acquiring the logistical means to mobilise a substantial number of people at the level of the constituency. In addition, young people emphasise the need for a social network covering the entire province. Indeed, even when they are dynamic, either as elected town council representatives or associational actors, their fame hardly exceeds the extent of their *douars*⁷. They are usually totally unknown beyond the limits of their municipalities. The testimony of Ahmed (39), elected to the Bittit Municipal Council, is a good example of the importance of a supportive social network.

"Maybe I will run in the legislative elections but not for the upcoming term. It is nothing like the municipal elections where all you need to get their vote is to be known by the people who live in your community. The legislative representation covers the whole province, so I need a lot of relations in different structures to have a chance to win!"

Finally, the difficulty young people encounter in accessing parliamentary office is strongly linked to party affiliation. For the most part, party membership is not based so much on partisan conviction as it is on practical considerations like accreditation as Municipal elections draw near: *"the party is only a hat for me to wear when necessary, I remove it when I feel like it."*

⁶The names have been changed in order to preserve anonymity.

⁷The *douar* can officially be defined as an "assemblage of households linked by real or fictitious kinship relations, and that corresponds to a territorial unit, which may include community modes of (farming) work and is managed as far as is possible by a Moqaddem (local representative of the Ministry of Interior)" (Ministry of Interior, 1964).

Differentiated electoral strategies: from the elective structures, the party, the association, and the family

Running for a seat in parliament is a project that many young people nurture and prepare for by deploying several strategies:

"The reason why young people do not run in parliamentary elections is that they are in a phase in which they have to make a living. It is only after the age of 40 that one starts thinking about it. Before, they are either studying to be able to come up with a solid résumé, or they are gathering money to finance the election campaign." (Rachid, 36 years old, president of a local development association).

Here are some profiles of young people with diverse political strategies.

Box 1: A springboard for elective office

Hassan is a 39 year-old man from the municipality of Ait Boubidmane. His strategy is to use a local elective office as a springboard to access to parliament.

After working abroad for six years, he returned in 2013 to his *douar* of Ait M'hand. He then began to contribute to the management of the family farm. At the same time, he got involved in the management of several local organisations of which he was a member. He was president of a development association (which he created with other young people before going abroad) and an agricultural cooperative. He was also vice-president of an irrigation association. He unsuccessfully ran for office in the Chamber of Agriculture election and, in 2015, in municipal elections. As for his legislative ambitions, Hassan said:

"My goal is no longer to settle for municipal office. Municipal office is merely a step toward access to the Chamber of Agriculture. Once there, I will prepare myself for the next legislative elections. The path that takes me through the Chamber is very important because that is where the agricultural producers and farmers are; if I can convince them to vote for me, I will win. For that, I have to work to secure their interests. I do know how to prepare applications to get project funding and I have an important network. The current president of the Chamber of Agriculture is a friend, so is the president of the Provincial Council. I also have good relations with the Ministry of Agriculture."

In this way, young people like Hassan opt for several local and regional elective structures to prepare for the legislative elections. Some young people insist on the need to go through institutions that allow them to gain popularity ("*chaâbiya*") among people in their province, which corresponds roughly to the legislative electoral district. The rural municipality is a prerequisite where one acquires patronage and sponsors as a member of the majority and ingratiates oneself to the Municipal Council presidency. Once the municipal anchor has been assured, ambitious candidates can extend their political horizons to include a larger territory, perhaps by appointment to the Provincial Council, the Chamber of Agriculture or even the Regional Council.

While young people do not seem to give too much importance to party affiliation in municipal elections, that strategy changes when it comes to parliamentary elections.

Box 2: Reinforcing the partisan position

The discourse of several young people reveals strategies for reinforcing their partisan orientations:

"I think that I will change parties because the one I belong to now does not offer good opportunities for advancement", or "to run for legislative office one needs to have solid party credentials."

Others prefer to support their party's candidate in parliamentary elections. This strategy is used by young people who belong to parties where the choice of the potential candidate is made after internal deliberations that sometimes result in the nomination of a candidate who is not a native of the province.

Party affiliation is only relatively important among young people in rural settings where partisan affiliation is not decisive, even though young people, male and female alike, may be affected. Indeed, young people face a twofold challenge: to run for office, one must have the support of a party even though party affiliation at the rural level is not determinant. In this dilemma, the fact of not having a good position in the political parties means that the party leadership will not propose these young people as candidates on the national list reserved for party youth (under 40), especially given that the selection of candidates for the youth quota does not depend on the local organisation, but on the central component. For these young people it thus becomes necessary to position themselves for selection via the youth quota. The following testimony from Rachid (36) shows that it is not always easy to improve one's position within the party:

"I do not hold membership of a party. At first, I was a member of Istiqlal but I no longer belong. One has to put in a lot of effort to achieve a position from which one can be nominated. Even if I had stayed there, they would never have nominated me. On the national list you will only find members of their families."

Even if young people are successful in building legitimacy through associational action and somehow manage to circumvent the slow progress of advancement within the party (Ftouhi et al., 2016; Kadiri et al., 2015), this strategy seems limited to municipal elections. Nevertheless, for these young people, running in the legislative elections tends to be a project that must be postponed until they have the necessary resources.

In addition, young people develop strategies to circumvent partisan anchoring and the lack of financial resources by getting involved in civil society.

Box 3: Mobilising activism in civil society

Rachid is a young man from Ait Boubidmane. He runs a mobile phone shop in the urban centre of Bouderbala. He plays an active role in local associations. He was president of a development association before creating another local business management association. He tried to join the Municipal Council and the Chamber of Agriculture in 2015, without success. Rachid seems to have a clear idea of how to prepare for the next legislative elections, as his testimony illustrates:

"My goal is to run in the legislative elections, but my first efforts (municipal elections followed by election to the Chamber of Agriculture) were a disappointment. The plan that I have decided to follow for the next two years is to involve myself in associational work. For two years we will devote ourselves to instructing the population on the roles of municipalities, civil society and elected officials. After two years we will mobilise a well-trained civil society, in addition to young elected officials motivated to develop the municipality. The objective is to include members in the municipality for the next elections".

This is how some young people believe that activism in civil society could prepare them for a political career and circumvent the difficulties involved in obtaining access to parliament. It would then involve many years in associational work, gradually climbing up the ladder from the local community to the town and finally to the province.

This strategy is described by young people as laborious, requiring substantial commitment and sacrifices that may affect their professional lives. Indeed, associational engagement involves organising activities and setting up development projects and leaves little time for young people to devote themselves to income-generating work. Associational leadership is not always easy and is developed in parallel with the construction of the young people's personal trajectories.

On the other hand, some young people, particularly those from more prosperous families, do not hesitate to take advantage of inherited assets; in particular by highlighting their family notability.

Box 4: Drawing on Family Notability

Mohamed, a 42-year-old, comes from a family of notables from Ait Boubidmane. His father was elected several times. After a year of working in the private sector, Mohamed created his own localised irrigation system installation company and made a name for himself in the area. When he was 30, he developed an interest in politics and became a member of the Chamber of Agriculture. In 2009, he became president of the Municipal Council of Ait Boubidmane. That same year, he ran for the Provincial Council and became president. In 2015, to the surprise of his constituents he did not run in the municipal elections. They quickly understood why. As a matter of fact, Mohamed supported two of his friends during the elections: one running for president in the municipality of Ait Boubidmane, the other for membership of the Provincial Council. Pursuing this anticipation strategy enabled him to secure their support during the legislative elections held the following year. As such, he began his election campaign a year in advance. Since the beginning of his electoral campaign for the legislative elections, he was present at all the ceremonies and festivals celebrated at the municipal level, trying to convince people to vote for him.

In addition to his entrepreneurial resources and his experience in the various electoral arenas, Mohamed also relies on his networks of notables in rallying the tribal vote, introducing himself as *Weld Iqbila* - the son of the tribe. Coming from the tribal confederation of the Beni Mtir, he was clever enough to include a candidate from the neighboring tribe of Guerouans, the second largest

tribe of the province, as the second man on his ticket for the legislative elections. This ingenious move helped him secure votes in all the communes of the province. In 2016, he managed to win one of the two seats reserved for the province of El Hajeb, despite the fact that he failed in the 2011 elections where he had presented himself as part of the youth quota of the national list.

Mohamed's path shows that beyond the resources mobilised by young people drawing on associational networks, some do not hesitate to identify themselves with their family ties and notability. It also shows that young people mobilise a range of referents and loyalties, including networks of notables, which contrasts with other research that opposes youth strategies to those of notables, their elders (Kadiri and Errahj, 2015).

Deciding not to run for legislative elections

Many young people combine strategies and approaches in preparing for legislative elections. Rachid, who seems to have had "a clear idea" about the path he would follow, developed a work programme spanning several years, with a likely scenario to guarantee success in the legislative elections. It begins at

"the municipal level. When I ran in the 2015 municipal elections, my ambition was to move to the regional level since municipal councillors are limited in scope and areas of action. Thanks to the experience I acquired through associational work and my ability to advocate for my ideas, I knew that I could make a place for myself at the Provincial Council level. And that's where the role of the party comes in; if you're an active member and you're able to make a name for yourself within the party so that you have party accreditation, you are halfway there. For example, if I were to stay with the Justice and Development Party, I would probably receive accreditation. Another 20% of any electoral victory is won through links you forge across the province. The remaining 30% you win in your municipality thanks to the people who voted for you at the municipal elections."

Even so, such strategies are not sufficient to guarantee a candidacy, much less a successful campaign, as can be seen from the experience of a youthful president of the Ait Harzallah municipality then in his third term on the municipal council. The individual in question is also a two-term member of the Provincial Council. Unlike others, he has been a member of the same political party since he was a student at the Faculty of Economics in Fez. Before engaging in political work, he became involved in community organising work and created the Ait Harzallah Association for Development and the Environment, which he continues to chair. It was through this association and the projects they were able to initiate for the benefit of the municipal population that he gained access to the Municipal Council for the first time. These projects included mainly: i) a medical campaign for the benefit of all members of the community that secured a high degree of visibility in the community, and ii) negotiating a community endowment for two school buses with foreign NGOs. This last project earned legitimacy for the association among the local population. Indeed, the school buses solved an important problem raised by a high level of school absenteeism and dropouts among students who lived in remote *douars* and could not get to school.

Hamid seems to meet all the criteria listed by young people to develop their strategies, but decided not to run in the 2016 elections. He said:

"I thought about it but it's very difficult because it takes a lot of material resources. Everyone encouraged me to run: the party members, the members of the Municipal Council, the population of my village, but I found it difficult. It takes enormous financial resources, logistics, people to sponsor me and time. However, I am very busy with my job and associational work. To run in legislative elections is an opportunity offered once or

twice in a life-time. I had an opportunity to do it in 2011. I had a chance to win because I had just won the municipal election. The council was made up of new members. Everyone was glad with this change and with the new management of the municipality. I had a very good reputation not only in my municipality, but also in the neighboring municipalities. In 2011, I was worried about not winning the elections. I had won the municipal elections in 2009 and I did not want to compromise this success. Losing would have been a disappointment to me and would have affected my work at the community level."

The electoral period: an opportunity to enhance one's local positioning

Not running in the legislative elections does not prevent young people from taking advantage of the political moment to negotiate their political rise and their local anchorage. Many are those who back candidates to secure their own support in other elections or help them obtain grants or funding for their associational and cooperative projects.

Hassan, a 39-year-old, did not run in the 2016 elections because he planned to go through the commune first and then through the Chamber of Agriculture. He also mentioned the fact that in his commune two "powerful" candidates were running for office. The two candidates came from families of rich notables who had held various positions in the Municipal Council as well as in the Provincial Council.

"At the moment, it is impossible for me to run in the legislative elections. There are already two very powerful candidates. In such a scenario, I would have no chance of winning, and neither would they, given that the votes in the constituency would be split".

During the election campaign, Hassan supported candidates from two different parties. The first, a member of his own party, is the president of the El Hajeb Municipal Council. The second candidate had been president of the Chamber of Agriculture for several terms and is currently a vice-president.

Hassan's dual positioning is justified by the fact that: i) supporting the first candidate allows him to attend the meetings he organises with his followers during the election campaign and thereby cultivate relations among the candidate's well-developed social network, ii) backing the second candidate guarantees the latter's support in the next professional elections, for the Chamber of Agriculture. Further, by supporting the second candidate, Hassan is certainly in a position to apply for subsidies for the cooperative that he chairs. His intention then is to mobilise the cooperative's members and beneficiaries of the cooperative irrigation project. Such beneficiaries are spread over several constituencies covering the entire municipality. The cooperative serves as a relay to convince voters to vote for one or the other of the two candidates he supports.

"I work with both candidates. I ask some of my acquaintances to vote for the first candidate while I ask others to vote for the second. That way, I preserve my interests in both coalitions."

The support of young leaders for a given candidate may also be dictated by the wish to obtain funds, enabling them to finance associational activities. At the time of the electoral campaign, one of the candidates in the province of El Hajeb used a local relay to negotiate with the young members of a drinking water association to convince the population of the *douar* to vote for him. These young people negotiated their support for the candidate in exchange for the repair of damaged pipes. Subsequently, the young people made direct contact with the candidate to

negotiate the terms of the exchange, then they convinced the inhabitants of the *douar* to vote for him. Part of the material was delivered before voting day, the remainder was to be delivered after voting day. However, the candidate failed to secure a seat in parliament, even though he polled a majority in the *douar*. After the elections, as the rest of the pipes had not been delivered, the members of the association reminded the candidate that they had fulfilled their part of the agreement. They received the rest of the promised material and were able to restore the drinking watersystem.

Some young people however prefer not to get involved during legislative elections and remain very cautious. They keep away from electoral negotiations or do not explicitly show their support for a given candidate. Indeed, when the candidates are elected, they may create various problems for the associational work of the young leaders who did not support them by, for instance, refusing grants or delaying administrative applications.

The place of young women in the legislative elections

In many countries, the overall political representation of women is very low, as evidenced by the United Nations Resolution of 2011. Indeed, young women are the least represented in all age groups (IPU, 2018a). The average percentage of women in national parliaments increased only slightly, from 22.6% in 2015 (UN-Women and IPU, 2017) to 23.3% in 2016 and to 23.4% in 2017 (IPU, 2018b). The introduction by some countries of quotas for women⁸ is one of the solutions adopted to overcome the under-representation of women in politics. Despite the increase in the number of female parliamentarians in North Africa, thanks to electoral quotas, the regional average in the MENA region remains low, having risen from 13% (OECD, 2014) to 17.5% in January 2018 (IPU, 2018b). Morocco is no exception to this rule. The rate of women's political representation in parliament was 10.46% in 2007, increasing to 16.96% in 2011 and then to 20.51% in 2016 (Benabdennebi, 2017). This progress is mainly the result of women accessing parliament via the national list (Bennani-Chraïbi, 2005). For example, during the 2007 elections, only 3% of the heads of candidate lists were women (Desrues and López García, 2008) and in 2016, out of 81 women representatives, only 10 were elected in local constituencies (Benabdennebi, 2017). Nevertheless, although the women's quota helped to increase the number of women in parliament, it did nothing to reinforce their autonomy and independence (Darhour and Krit, 2012). Moreover, the preparation of local constituency lists for legislative elections shows that, despite the increase in the number of female representatives, the promotion of women is not a priority among Moroccan political parties so long as political parties select their legislative candidates based on the affluence and social relations of their members (Lidell, 2009).

Furthermore, during the 2011 legislative elections, the quota reserved for young people under 40 was exclusively male (Benabdennebi, 2017), highlighting the twofold exclusion of women. Following amendment of the Organic law regulating the National Legislature, young female candidates during the 2016 legislative elections were included in the youth quota (Benabdennebi, 2017). Each party however remained free to manage its lists as there were no legal prescriptions regarding female representation or exclusion (CNDH, 2015). Finally, if the female quota resulted in a more equitable representation in parliament, it was nonetheless considered a "refuge" where women could protect themselves from the competitiveness of local lists, or as "a ghetto" where male candidates could send women to keep local lists for themselves (Desrues and López García, 2008).

⁸In Morocco this quota was established in 2002. A national list was created to reserve 10% of the seats for women in the lower chamber of parliament. As a result, 35 women gained access to parliament, 30 through the national list and five through local constituencies (see Benabdennebi, 2017).

Box 5: From preschool training to the Municipal Council

Khadija, a young woman aged 47, is from the Ait Ali Bouhoudouarin the Laqsir municipality. After her marriage, she left to live with her husband in Ain Taoujdate where she opened a second preschool / daycare centre after opening one in her own *douar*. Initially, she provided free tutoring and literacy classes for women. Then she created an association to be eligible for grants under the INDH. Since then, Khadija has hired several instructors who teach literacy classes in several *douars* across the province.

In 2009, Khadija ran, unsuccessfully, for the first time in the elections. She confronted “a world dominated by men” and met with categorical rejection by men who refused to vote for, or “be ruled by a woman”. Although several people had advised her to present her candidacy through the women’s quota list for Municipal elections, she chose to run directly and manage her own election campaign. Finally, in the 2015 elections, she ran on the women’s quota list and managed to get elected to the Municipal Council.⁹

Khadija’s trajectory demonstrates how, if a young man’s access to parliament is difficult, a young woman’s path is even more fraught. Indeed, it is almost impossible for them to serve on the Municipal Council without entering through the female quota. For these young women, the first step in contemplating a run for legislative office is to establish themselves as likely candidates for municipal office, in the same way men do, without having to go through the quota list.

Young men and women share the same vision when it comes to taking advantage of the electoral moment to negotiate their local anchorage; as evidenced by the experience of Fatima (36), who was elected to the Municipal Council of Ait Harzellah in 2015. She declined many requests of candidates asking for her support during the campaign and chose to be on the side of a candidate whom she described as “a man of his word and helpful”. Their collaboration began just after her election to the Municipal Council. As a friend of her father’s, the candidate helped her to recover the family land after a dispute with the State. A year before the parliamentary elections, they agreed that she would support him in the elections in exchange for his promise to generate projects for the benefit of the municipality where she was elected.

Conclusion

Beyond the dominant discourse concerning the low political participation of young people, investigation of the trajectories of rural youth seeking election since 2009 confirm that rural people are not “disconnected from politics”. On the contrary, they are more active than in cities, as illustrated by the official turnout during the 2016 elections. They are likely to negotiate local actions related to their needs. It is not party membership that determines voters’ choice, but the ability of candidates and their intermediaries to convince voters of their willingness and capacity to meet voters’ needs, even before the first ballot is cast. As a result, the electoral period is the ideal moment to address existing local issues. In this configuration, young people take advantage of legislative elections to negotiate their needs with the candidates.

Some young people are aware of their inability to gain parliamentary seats. At the same time, they are aware that support for one or another candidate is a way to secure support for their own

⁹ For an analysis of the same dynamics in an urban setting see Berriane, 2015.

futures. In this way, they lay a foundation from which they may assert their own leadership efforts, positioning themselves as part of a local elite and as a relay between the potential candidate and the population (Bennani-Chaïbi, 2005; Iraki, 2010). That said, they are generally reluctant to be tied down to these candidates and manipulated by them.

The role played by these young people is not limited to that of some unemployed graduates hired as election employees during the campaign (Zaki, 2009). Their engagement in election campaigns is well thought out; they choose their side according to their own interests and the goals they set for themselves. In this way, political and electoral objectives and issues are territorialised. They depend on the territory and configurations in which the leaders, cooperatives, associations, communes, and legislative districts operate.

The present authors' findings confirm L. Zaki's (2009) statements in terms of the need for "notability resources" in order to win legislative elections. Indeed, if the technical resources mobilised by young people appear inadequate to ensure municipal electability (Kadiri et al., 2015), such insufficiency is even more pronounced when it comes to legislative level. Thus, young people will consider the electoral moment as a resource in itself, and as a means to assert themselves at the local level rather than as a chance to gain a seat in the legislature. Yet the prospect of running for legislative office is not entirely excluded. It is rather a project to achieve in the long term.

Finally, some researchers have highlighted the fact that the effort required of women who aspire to leadership roles is necessarily greater than that required of men (Bourke and Luloff, 1997). This would explain the relative scarcity of women in politics at the level of the Municipal Council, an honour achieved almost exclusively through the female quota list. This situation affects their visibility on the political scene and postpones their claim to seats in parliamentary elections.

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