

ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK ON POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

*Edited by Francesco Cavatorta, Lise Storm
and Valeria Resta*

First published 2021

ISBN: 978-0-367-21986-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-26921-9 (ebk)

18

YOUTH ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL PARTIES

(CC BY-NC-ND 4.0)

DOI: 10.4324/9780429269219

The funder for this chapter is Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG)



YOUTH ACTIVISM AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Kressen Thyen

Introduction

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), electoral turnout and party membership has been in decline over the past 50 years. The trend of disengagement from formal politics has been most acute among the younger generations. Four per cent of young people aged 18–29 are members of a political party, and only one in four voted in the most recent elections.¹ These developments have been accompanied by a relative absence of youth mobilisation in the public sphere. Until late 2010, most observers seemed to agree that large-scale youth movements were mainly a thing of the past, and that youth as a social category was alienated, divided, and frustrated, and played only a marginal role in the political arena (Meijer 2000; Dhillon et al. 2009). Consequently, the majority of youth-related studies examining the period prior to the Arab Uprisings concentrated on youth culture and identity, gender relations, religious orientation, arts and music, and generational conflict (see, e.g. Herrera and Bayat 2010; Khalaf and Khalaf 2011). Where research focussed on youth activism, it emphasised its dispersed and fragmented engagement in form of ‘non-movements’ (Bayat 2010).

The Arab Uprisings created excitement in both academic and public circles because it finally appeared as if ‘the youth population [had] been awoken’ (Hoffman and Jamal 2012: 169). As anti-regime protests spread from Tunisia throughout the region, youth activists managed to draw many of the fragmented and previously unorganised youth groups into mass movements, thereby forcing a number of long-standing rulers to resign. Young activists and academics alike hoped that their success would lead to enhanced political participation in new, inclusive and even democratic political systems. Yet, the uprisings did not – with the exception of Tunisia – trigger democratisation, nor revive electoral and party activism in a sustainable manner. Political parties continue to engender little trust among young people, who express a preference for looser forms of less hierarchical self-organisation, including media activism and protest movements. Most scholars have thus come to the conclusion that youth political activism in the MENA is ‘manifested outside of the established formal political structures and long-established political parties’ (Murphy 2012: 11).

Recent studies attribute the low rates of youth involvement in political parties to the authoritarian and exclusive character of the political regimes; the combined effects of social, political and economic exclusion; low youth representation in the political leadership; the

failure of political parties – and their ageing leaders – to recognise and address youth problems; the perceived hypocrisies and hierarchies in party politics; and disappointment with the performance of political parties in general (see, e.g. Sika 2012, 2017; Marks 2013; Murphy 2012; Salih et al. 2017; El-Sharnouby 2018; Zerhouni 2019). Based on these findings, there is a tendency in academic and policy discourse to treat youth activism and party politics as two contrasting areas.

Yet the relationship between youth activism and involvement with formal politics is not so simple. While electoral participation of young people is comparatively low in the MENA, political party membership corresponds to the global average and even exceeds many European countries.² This being said, membership levels vary greatly across the region. In Lebanon and Palestine, 10–11 per cent of young people aged 18–29 state they are a member of a political party, compared to 4 per cent in Israel, 3 per cent in Morocco, 2 per cent in Tunisia, and 1 per cent or less in Egypt, Algeria and Jordan.³ Further, empirical evidence brings greater nuance to the binary either-or view of alternative forms of participation and party politics. Youth activists who participated in the Tunisian uprisings were by no means less favourably disposed towards the major political parties or elections than their non-protesting counterparts (Doherty et al. 2019: 14). In contexts as divergent as Egypt and Morocco, protest participation among educated youth was positively linked to membership of a political organisation (Thyen and Gerschewski 2018: 50). Online activism – often presented as a new form of participation – is positively related to political party membership and, despite higher levels of internet use among young people, the 18–35-year-olds use it less frequently for political purposes than those aged 36 and above (Thomas 2018: 11). Finally, youth involvement in politics and its relationship with political parties, as well as the role of political parties themselves, has varied geographically and over time (Abdalla 2008; Erlich 2015; El-Sharnouby 2018).

To better grasp these apparent ambivalences, this chapter discusses the use of ‘youth’ and ‘youth activism’, then shows how youth activism has varied across political generations, and explores the tensions between youth activism and formal participation in the context of the Arab uprisings, before concluding with some avenues for further research.

The specificities of youth activism

The notion of youth – and thus youth activism – is relatively recent in the academic and political debate. This is because youth as a social constituency emerged only with the expansion of university education after World War II, which generated a new category of young adults between childhood and adulthood (Briggs 2017: 3). Since then, there has been heated debate on how to define the category (for an overview, see Murphy 2012, France and Roberts 2015). Broadly speaking, there are three usages of the concept: as an age group, a cohort and a generation (Roberts 2015: 951–52). Youth as an age group exists, within dynamic societies, at all times; a cohort experiences a specific event at the same time (year or decade); a generation is set apart from its predecessors through a historically new experience that forms its consciousness for life (*ibid.*). While operationalisation of the concept in terms of age groups is necessary for research and policy purposes, political science research usually adopts a generational perspective.⁴

From a generational approach, youth is defined in terms of a relationship (with its seniors), and youth activism refers to political actions in which participants consider themselves, and are perceived by others, to be members of an upcoming, usurping generation rather than mere supporters or successors of the established political class (Roberts 2015: 953). There is hence a difference between youth activism and youth involvement in politics. Youth activism implies the articulation of specifically ‘youthful’ claims, and while such claims can be expressed within

or merge into broader political movements, this should not be confused with circumstances in which young people happen to be part of a specific political organisation or movement (Bayat 2011: 49).

With the blossoming of literature on youth movements after the Arab uprisings, scholars of the MENA have increasingly linked youth activism with informal political participation. However, the term political activism – including youth activism – describes ‘the ways that citizens participate, the processes that lead them to do so, and the consequences of these acts’ (Norris 2009: 102). This includes actions ranging from voting, to conventional activism in political parties, to political protest. Consequently, youth activism can include mobilisation for a new, youthful party, or engagement in a political youth organisation, or youth movements.

There has also been a tendency to treat ‘the youth’ as a coherent ‘collectivity’ with a shared understanding of politics. This is problematic, because youth as a social category is as diverse as the rest of society, divided along socio-demographic lines such as class, education, gender and place of residence. Moreover, the young population is increasingly fragmented by processes of urbanisation, Islamisation and globalisation (Bayat 2011: 50–51). While such divisions also exist in developed democracies, they play a particular role in societies with high levels of inequality and social immobility, such as in the MENA, where socio-cultural boundaries are even harder to cross. Therefore, specific instances of youth activism – including the youth movements of the Arab Uprisings – are never representative of an entire generation.

In a similar vein, the widely shared image of ‘revolutionary youth’ tends to obscure the fact that the majority of young people do not necessarily hold revolutionary political ideals. Prior to the 2011 uprisings, those aged 18–24 were on average more satisfied with their governments than the cohorts aged 25–34 and 35–44 (Hoffmann and Jamal 2012: 180). Despite the youth activism encouraged by the anti-regime protests, recent surveys show little or no variation between the attitudes of the younger and older cohorts towards democracy (Moaddel and De Jong 2017; Abbott and al. 2018). In Tunisia, where one would have expected regime change to have triggered a particular interest in democratic procedures, only 38 per cent of young Tunisians were able correctly to identify the purpose of the 2011 election: to choose an assembly and to write a new constitution (IFES 2011: 5). Yet the narrative of pro-democratic youth opposed to geronto-autocrats, both in self-portrayal and external attribution, remains strong and is tied to the historical impact of youth movements in shaping and transforming politics.⁵

Youth activism across political generations

The history of youth activism in the MENA is closely intertwined with the region’s socio-political transformations since Ottoman rule. Youth movements were an important factor in shaping and transforming politics, including party organisations, during the first half of the twentieth century. They disappeared as a mass phenomenon in the 1970s, and only recently resurged with the Arab uprisings. Throughout this period, the relationship to and involvement of youth activists in party politics has varied considerably.

National liberation movements

Before independence from European empires, many of the movements that aimed to recruit the masses to their struggle for national unity and liberation came together under the term *futuwwa* (youth) (Erlich 2015: 4). Youth activism was one of the driving forces in the creation of independent states, as youth groups openly challenged the conservative nationalist parties

that operated within pre-independence politics. Their emergence is intrinsically linked to the expansion of modern education in the late colonial and mandate period. New skills and knowledge fostered self-confidence among the educated youth, who came to see themselves – and were seen – as the political avant-garde (ibid.). Schools and universities were at the core of their activism and mirrored the political struggles of the time (Jankowski 1967; Abdalla 2008).

One of the pioneers in the struggle for independence was the Young Egypt Movement, founded by law students and graduates from the Egyptian University in 1933. The organisation challenged the more conservative Wafd party and the royal palace by proclaiming an Arab-Islamic version of nationalism, which cultivated strong anti-British sentiments. Economic dislocation and its repercussions among broad swathes of the population proved a fertile ground for new forms of mass politics. In 1935–1936, university students spilled into the streets, mobilising other segments of the population into violent mass protests. Following the *thawra* (revolution), the British authorities announced negotiations with the Wafd party on the signing of a treaty of independence and the reinstatement of the previously abolished constitution. The events in Egypt prompted a period of similar rebellious episodes in Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine (Erich 2015; Anderson 2016).

The youth mobilisations in the Middle East experienced a break during World War II, then forcefully reappeared in Pan-Arab movements. Following independence, the Nasserite and Ba'athist take-overs in the Middle East led to the removal of the old elites and their party politics by young army officers. The single parties that they established in the republics as instruments of 'revolution from above' usurped the youth movements that had brought them to power, neutralising their energy by acting as their representatives and spokespersons (Erich 2015; El-Sharnouby 2018).

In North Africa, the movements for national liberation became organised as political parties.⁶ In Tunisia, youth activists had split from the nationalist Destour to form the more radical Neo-Destour, whose membership overlapped to a great extent with that of the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT). The Neo-Destour remained the ruling party, albeit under different names, until 2011. Though more conservative, Morocco's Istiqlal party also relied on a young activist body in its struggle for independence and established its youth wing only weeks into independence. In Algeria, the armed wing of the National Liberation Front (FLN) involved many young fighters in the violent war for independence.

The weight of young people in the nationalist constituencies, combined with their propensity to activism and mobilisation, motivated political organisations across the MENA to compete over their recruitment. Youth wings and student associations were established in both multi-party and single-party systems, as the newly established elites aimed to channel the energy of the youth movements into their respective political projects. This reinforced and amplified the importance of youth agency in national politics (Anderson 2016: 1266).

Post-populism and political differentiation

From the 1970s, the collapse of Pan-Arabism and economic liberalisation altered conditions for youth activism. With the formation of 'post-populist authoritarianism' (Hinnebusch 2017), youth mobilisation as a mass phenomenon disappeared from national politics, as some young activists found a place in the newly stabilised regimes, and others demobilised or joined opposition movements.

The political reforms leading to dominant-party and various forms of multi-party systems offered new opportunities for political participation among politically relevant categories of youth, specifically those with personal followings and family alliances. Young people remained

highly visible in party politics throughout the 1970s, both as militants and members of parliament. The reformist tendencies of the younger generation, coupled with higher levels of education, fitted well with the political concern of many countries for modernisation, making them models for national development and candidates for leadership roles (Tessler and Keppel 1976). In Morocco, the assembly elected in 1977 was particularly young, with 75 per cent of its parliamentarians between 25 and 44 years old (Bennani-Chraïbi 2008: 207). At the same time, the party leadership was forced to deliver government patronage or moderate its demands in exchange for political inclusion. This eroded societal support for parties across the political spectrum.

The socio-political changes prompted a decline in political participation among the less educated, lower- and middle-class youth. In Tunisia, only 10 per cent of young people with secondary but without tertiary education were still active in political organisations (Tessler and Keppel 1976: 85). Unfulfilled expectations, together with the reality of their political position, led to political alienation among young people from the middle classes. Just as in the revolutionary movements and contexts in Europe prior to World War II, they became the ‘disgruntled and potentially radical element in society’ (Tessler and Keppel 1976: 101).⁷ In search of a political alternative, many young people joined Islamist movements that had begun to fill the void of ‘pan-regional pride’ (Erlich 2015: 3). Despite its considerable influence, political Islam was however unable to create a consensus among young people regarding its societal project. Instead, youth mobilisation became ideologically more heterogeneous than in the past – a trend that has also been observed on a global level (Braungart and Braungart 1990).

Growing socio-political disparities, and differentiation within the younger generation, prevented the emergence of a new, ‘youth’ project. Instead, political affiliation and activity were increasingly transmitted through family allegiances, and in many countries, party politics became dominated by prominent family clans. In Syria, for example, the Al-Assad family has ruled the country through the Ba’ath party since Hafez al-Assad became president in 1971. In Lebanon, older members of parliament made it common practice to pass their seats on to younger members of the family. Even in Morocco, although less apparent, political parties such as the Istiqlal and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) increasingly developed into parties of established families.

Liberalisation and marginalisation

In the 1980s, the austerity measures imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) following the debt crisis altered conditions for youth activism. In response to growing internal and external pressure, governments further liberalised the party systems. The reforms had a number of common effects on partisan configurations (Catusse and Karam 2010): the number of parties increased substantially; parties across the political spectrum entered into close interdependent relations with the ruling elites; party members became driven more strongly by logics of co-optation and redistribution than by the will to exercise power; party ideologies faded in favour of political strategies and professionalisation (including left-wing and Islamist parties); party membership became more fluid and flexible, both for the leadership and militants; party profiles became more obscure than in the past, reducing opportunities for recruitment and thus membership levels.

In this changing political landscape, access to resources became more important for a political career than the capacity to mobilise masses. The ‘*notabilisation*’ of parliament (Bennani-Chraïbi 2008) coincided with a period in which the cost of being young increased. The early 2000s constituted the peak of the ‘youth bulge’ in the MENA (Courbage 2011: 86).⁸ Paired with economic stagnation, this demographic trend created disproportional rates of unemployment

among the younger generation, which in turn caused continued financial dependency on the families (Singerman 2007). A lack of social status during the prolonged period of ‘waithood’ (ibid.) constituted an additional barrier to achieving political influence in the clientelistic and professionalised party environment. Young party members struggled for influence as partisan stalwarts continued to age. In 2002, Egyptian governmental and oppositional politics were dominated by old men, with an average age of 77. The younger generation continued to withdraw from party politics, including the formerly active category of university students. In a survey conducted at Cairo University before the uprisings, only 16 per cent of students expressed an interest in party politics (Bayat 2011: 59).

Even though youth participation declined across the region, the decline was less steep in multi-party systems. In Lebanon, party membership among young people remained comparatively high, as the ten major sectarian political groups could rely on their youth associations, which to this day provide sporting, leisure and cultural events for young people and ultimately mobilise them into their partisan structure (Harb 2016: 6–7). In Morocco, most political parties had relatively autonomous youth wings, even though these did not constitute mass organisations (Zerhouni 2019: 49). In the late 2000s, the youth wing of the Istiqlal numbered around 27,000 members and grouped into 403 local sections. Similarly, the youth wing of the USFP counted reportedly 24,000 members (Desrues and Kirhlani 2013: 755–6). The recruitment of young party members was facilitated by the permeability between the political party and associative sectors (ibid.: 758–9). More recent parties, such as the Authenticity and Modernity Party (PAM), strategically recruited young members beyond established families (Wolf 2018: 60). The government supported the parties’ efforts by establishing the Institute for Youth and Democracy in 2006, which offers training opportunities for young party members (Thyen 2018: 102–103). Jordan constitutes a somewhat exceptional case, as its political parties have traditionally had weaker ties with society, with large shares of votes going to independent candidates, and levels of electoral participation therefore varied little between the 1950s and 1990s (Lust 2001).

The ruling parties in the republics also had substantial youth wings.⁹ According to the report of the ninth session of Tunisia’s Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD), its Democratic Constitutional Youth Organisation (OJCD) had 460,000 members in 1997. Yet these youth organisations differed in their function and organisation from those operating in more competitive contexts. Given the hierarchical organisation of their mother parties, they were obliged to follow their policies and procedures and served, at best, as think tanks (see, e.g. Sika 2012: 186). Consequently, they offered little opportunity for genuine youth activism, and young party members accorded less priority to social and political reforms than to the advancement of their individual careers. Among some of the smaller opposition parties, youth organisations functioned somewhat differently. For example, the youth wing of Egypt’s Democratic Front Party (DFP) was particularly influential, accounting for 1,500 of the 4,000 party members, and enjoyed much more autonomy (Sika 2012: 188). However, the uneven competition structures limited their opportunities for mass recruitment.

With the de-politicisation and elitism of party politics, young people increasingly resorted to street demonstrations or even riots to express their grievances (Bennani-Chraïbi 2010; Martinez 2010). Studies estimate that up to 30 per cent of young people had participated in some form of protest activity – mostly against specific policies or government decisions – before the Arab uprisings (Hoffmann and Jamal 2012: 177). These developments were accompanied by the emergence of new youth movements. The most well-known are probably the 6 April Youth Movement and Youth for Change (*Kifāya’s* youth wing) in Egypt, but similar groups emerged across the region (see, e.g. Murphy 2012; Sika 2017). In contrast to the mass movements of the

past, these rejected traditional leadership and refused to define themselves in partisan or ideological terms. While they aimed to bring their respective government and its institutions down, they ‘never intended to replace it by themselves’ (Abdelrahman 2013: 582).

New hope: the Arab Uprisings

In view of the limited role that youth movements had played in national politics over several decades, their sudden re-emergence and pivotal role in the Arab Uprisings took the world by surprise. The killing of Khaled Said in police custody in Egypt and the self-immolation of Mohammed Bouazizi in Tunisia triggered waves of indignation among the younger generation, uniting formerly divided sectors of young people into anti-regime movements. Their success in ousting former presidents Ben Ali and Mubarak prompted similar movements across the region, revitalising the role and self-perception of youth as a motor of change.¹⁰

The extent to which political party activists participated in the youth movements varied. In dominant-party regimes as Egypt and Tunisia, mobilisation occurred largely separate from formal political organisations, although activists from smaller opposition parties and the UGTT were involved (Abdalla 2016: 47; Yaghi 2018: 318). In Morocco, party members – including parties represented in government and parliament, such as the youth wing of the USFP and the *Baraka* youth wing offshoot of the Justice and Development Party (PJD) – were very present in the 20 February Movement, defying their leaderships’ directives not to participate in the protests (Desrués and Kirhlani 2013: 754). In the case of the PAM, harsh criticism of the *makhzen* by young party members forced its founder, royal advisor El Himma, to resign from his party position. These differences are related both to the distinct profiles of the political youth organisations, as well as the divergent protest traditions in the different regimes (Thyen 2018).

Where regimes changed following the uprisings, political reform initially broadened space for political participation across the region. This seemed to somewhat reconcile youth activists and political parties: between 2011 and 2013, party membership among young people increased on average from eight to ten per cent.¹¹ Young party members also became more self-confident vis-à-vis their leaderships. In Morocco, political youth organisations successfully pushed for a quota to be reserved for young candidates in the legislative elections of November 25, 2011 (Belschner 2018). Shortly thereafter, Egypt and Tunisia also introduced youth quotas as part of the political reform process. However, in contrast to the youth mobilisations of the twentieth century, the impact of the new youth movements ultimately proved to be ‘disruptive rather than formative’ (Abdalla 2016: 58).

The failure of the youth movements to establish themselves as political organisations is, first of all, a result of their weak social base. Specifically, they were unable to bridge class divides, although this ability had been a factor in the success of youth activism until the 1970s (Tessler and Keppel 1976; Erlich 2015). With the successive retreat of the middle classes, two distinct profiles of young protestors emerged, namely those with a university degree and those with primary education or below, with the middle category largely absent. The youth activists who organised the protest movements mostly belong to the urban, educated upper-middle class and, while they succeeded in bringing other categories of youth into the streets, they were not able to develop sustainable ties or expand their membership across the cultural and socio-economic divisions (Yaghi 2018: 313).

Secondly, the youth movements did not have a distinctive political project that could have formed the basis for a political organisation and thereby challenge existing ones. The ‘post-ideological turn’ (El-Sharnouby 2018) in youth activism created more diffuse modes of belonging, structured around shared concerns such as democratic change – a characteristic

shared by new social movements worldwide (Norris 2009). While this ideological openness enabled young people across political and socio-economic boundaries to unite, it also led to the dispersion of the heterogeneous alliance of youth groups after the uprisings. In Egypt, where the mobilisations had been particularly strong, observers have counted up to 193 separate youth groups a year into the transition (Yaghi 2018: 313). While some of these groups attempted to establish parties following political reform, not one has been able to win many seats and establish itself. Scholars attribute this to a lack of internal cohesion due to diverging political opinions, structural weaknesses, and limited organisational capacities (Abdelrahman 2013; Abdalla 2016; Yaghi 2018).

Thirdly, party politics have not substantively changed following regime changes. Despite political pluralisation, few sizeable and durable new parties have emerged that could challenge the traditionally dominant parties or political forces behind them (Cavatorta and Storm 2018: 9–10). Within the established parties, important posts continue to be filled by young members with a track record rather than new members. Despite regime change, this also applies in Tunisia, where Nidaa Tounes integrated former RDC youth (Wolf 2018: 60). Consequently, many youth activists who joined political parties after the uprisings were disappointed, feeling they had been used for mobilisation purposes only to be then excluded from internal decision-making processes (Yaghi 2018: 323; Zerhouni 2019).

Fourthly, there is a growing gap between young people's political orientations and the political choices available. While the youth movements lean to the left in their demands, the unequal structures for political opportunity in the region continue to marginalise parties with genuinely left-wing agendas, cutting them off from their mobilisation channels (Resta 2018: 36–37). Instead, party politics continue to be dominated by patronage networks where left-wing parties fare less well. As de Miguel et al. (2015) demonstrate, people are still disproportionately likely to vote if they have in the past used *wasta* (favouritism) and are satisfied with how the government handles the economy. Consequently, many youth activists find no political home.

Finally, failed transitions and increasing repression impacted on the capacity of youth activists to mobilise following the uprisings, both as informal youth movements and newly created political parties. In Egypt, the April 6 Movement was officially banned following the 2013 military coup and, despite authorisation to operate, several political parties saw their student groups at universities banned (Abdalla 2016: 59). Although the degree varies between countries, repression of youth activism is today more the rule than the exception across the region, due to its proven capacity for disruption and political destabilisation.

In sum, the Arab Uprisings neither brought about a powerful, 'youth' organisation, nor restored confidence in existing parties among the majority of the young population. Between 2013 and 2016, average party membership dropped from ten to four per cent, and electoral participation from 44 to 30 per cent.¹² In Tunisia, where expectations of increased participation were higher due to regime change, frustration with political parties is in fact particularly high: only about a quarter of young people aged 18–29 participated in the 2014 parliamentary election.¹³ Instead, they are increasingly involved in street protests, and so far, there is little indication that such political activism will have a positive impact on youth representation in the near future.

Conclusion

The literature on youth activism, in the MENA and beyond, constitutes a stimulating field for research. Yet the relationship between youth activism and political parties, as well as the level of party activism among young people, deserves further attention. As noted earlier, there is

by now a substantial body of work on youth movements in the context of the Arab Uprisings that emphasises both their importance in triggering political change and reform, as well as their marginalisation in national politics. The combined effects of socio-economic and political exclusion, as well as disenchantment with political parties, are recurrent themes in explaining low levels of electoral and militant activism. This attention to structural resources and cultural attitudes reflects standard accounts of political participation (Norris 2009).

Nevertheless, many studies ultimately attribute the declining levels of youth engagement in political parties to the authoritarian character of political regimes, which supposedly forces young people to express their opinions through less formal modes of participation. In doing so, scholars tend to overlook that many democracies suffer from the same phenomenon and that despite many similarities, electoral and party activism varies widely in the region. In Lebanon, Palestine, and Yemen, youth membership in political parties exceeds that in most Western democracies, and Morocco and Tunisia register higher membership rates than the Netherlands or the United Kingdom.¹⁴ In fact, the most studied case in the region, Egypt, is among the countries with the lowest levels of youth participation and should therefore be generalised only cautiously. A greater attention to local context is therefore needed, including an examination of the different functions that political parties can fulfil, in explaining young people's involvement with party politics.

Despite the presence of MENA-specific traits, some characteristics of youth activism in the region do not differ greatly from the rest of the world, including the tendency towards single-issue protests and the rejection of partisan affiliations (Norris 2009; Sukarieh and Tannock 2014). Looking at the latter, the negative effects of co-optation and professionalisation on the recruitment of young members echo current processes in democracies:

As parties [in democracies] get closer to the state and become more professionalised, they find it easier to ignore their volunteers [...]. [T]here is a generational dimension to these trends, with the recruitment of new age cohorts being problematic everywhere, but particularly so in high-regulation countries.

(Whiteley 2011: 36)

This being said, electoral abstention is much higher among North African and Middle Eastern youth, reflecting the lack of deep-rooted political parties in their societies. Adopting a differentiated view of the factors impacting on militant versus electoral activism could help us to better grasp the various and evolving functions of political parties in competitive authoritarian regimes.

Furthermore, greater attention should be paid to young party activists, including their political aims and visions for the party. Little is known about the role of political youth organisations in the region, even though some case studies mention inner-party conflicts over generational renewal (al-Mershed 2010; Desrues and Kirhlani 2013). There are also few studies on the social processes by which political parties and related associations mobilise young people, or on the broader context of the formal and informal rules governing forms of participation, highlighting the need to examine how institutions shape voting turnout and party membership, as well as other forms of participation.

Finally, attention should be paid to the political use of 'youth' in the region and beyond. As Bono (2013) argues, the framing of the recent protest movements as *youth* movements with *youth*-specific demands – rather than universal demands benefitting the whole population – has contributed to their de-politicisation. Specially, she shows how the promotion of youth-specific forms of participation, justified by their rejection of party politics, not only normalises their

exclusion from formal politics, but also transforms youth activists into professional facilitators of ‘youth participation’ (Bono 2013: 163; see also Somi 2016). A similar critique is formulated by Sukarieh and Tannock (2014), who conclude that the current over-emphasis on youth exclusion – and the related policy language of ‘resilience’ and ‘capacity building’ – threatens to transform political conflicts into generational ones by obscuring the socio-political struggles of, and cross-generational strategies in, the respective mobilisations.

Notes

- 1 Data taken from the Arab Barometer Wave IV (2016–2017). Here and in the following analysis, weights have been applied.
- 2 In the MENA, 4 per cent of those aged 18–29 state they are members of a political party, compared to three per cent in Europe and four per cent worldwide. Averages taken from the Arab Barometer Wave IV (2016–2017), European Social Survey Wave VIII (2016) and World Value Survey Wave VI (2010–2014).
- 3 European Social Survey Wave VIII (Israel), Arab Barometer Wave IV (all other countries).
- 4 The United Nations define youth as those aged 15–24, while others expand the category to 30 or even 40. When referring to survey data, this chapter refers to 18–29-year-olds, which is in line with most studies focussing on the MENA.
- 5 The self-ascription of the young generation as carriers of change has deep historical roots, spanning the Young Ottomans, the Young Turks, the Young Egypt Movement, and the Young Officers. For a historical overview, see Erlich 2015.
- 6 Libya is an exception in so far as the independent monarchy abolished political parties a year into its existence.
- 7 This finding does not apply to young people with only primary education, who were simply not very interested in politics. Because they did not expect to acquire much political influence, they were reasonably content with the government and its provisions (ibid.).
- 8 Palestine is an exception, as the peak of the youth bulge was only reached in 2020.
- 9 The Algerian FLN is an exception, having established its youth organisation only in 2015.
- 10 In some countries, such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq, the emergence of mass uprisings was impeded by persisting religious, ethnic and/or tribal divides in society, including among the young population.
- 11 Arab Barometer Waves II (2010–2011) and III (2012–2014).
- 12 Arab Barometer Waves III–IV.
- 13 Arab Barometer Wave IV.
- 14 Arab Barometer Wave IV and European Social Survey Wave VIII.

Bibliography

- Abbott, Pamela, Andrea Teti, and Roger Sapsford. 2018. ‘The tide that failed to rise: Young people’s politics and social values in and after the arab uprisings’. *Mediterranean Politics* 25 (1): 1–25.
- Abdalla, Ahmed. 2008. *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt 1923–1973*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- Abdalla, Nadine. 2016. ‘Youth movements in the Egyptian transformation: Strategies and repertoires of political participation’. *Mediterranean Politics* 21(1): 44–63.
- Abdelrahman, Maha. 2013. ‘In praise of organization: Egypt between activism and revolution’. *Development and Change* 44 (3): 569–585.
- Anderson, Charles. 2016. ‘Youth’. In Richard C. Martin (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*. 2nd Edition. New York: Macmillan.
- Bayat, Asef. 2011. ‘Reclaiming Youthfulness’. In Samir Khalaf and Roseanne Saad Khalaf (eds.) *Arab Youth: Social Mobilisation in Times of Risk*. London: Saqi Books.
- Bayat, Asef. 2010. *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Belschner, Jana. 2018. ‘The adoption of youth quotas after the Arab uprisings’. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*. Online first at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21565503.2018.1528163.

- Bennani-Chraïbi, Mounia. 2010. 'Youth in Morocco: An Indicator of Changing Society'. In Roel Meijer (ed.) *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth: Between Family, State and Street*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- Bennani-Chraïbi, Mounia. 2008. "'Hommes d'affaires" versus "Prof de fac"'. La notabilisation parlementaire d'un parti de militants au Maroc'. *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée* 15 (2): 205–219.
- Bono, Irene. 2013. 'Une lecture d'économie politique de la "participation des jeunes" au Maroc à l'heure du printemps Arabe'. *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée* 20 (4): 145–166.
- Braungart, Richard G. and Margaret M. Braungart. 1990. 'Youth Movements in the 1980s: A Global Perspective'. *International Sociology* 5 (2): 157–181.
- Briggs, Jacqueline. 2017. *Young People and Political Participation: Teen Players*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Catusse, Myriam and Karam Karam. 2010. 'Back to Parties? Partisan Logics and Transformations of Politics in the Arab World'. In Myriam Catusse and Karam Karam (eds.) *Returning to Political Parties? Political Party Development in the Arab World*. Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo.
- Cavatorta, Francesco and Lise Storm. 2018. 'Do Arabs Not Do Parties? An Introduction and Exploration'. In Francesco Cavatorta and Lise Storm (eds.) *Political Parties in the Arab World: Continuity and Change*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Courbage, Youssef. 2011. 'The Demographic Youth Bulge and Social Rupture'. In Samir Khalaf and Roseanne Saad Khalaf (eds.) *Arab Youth: Social Mobilisation in Times of Risk*. London: Saqi Books.
- De Miguel, Carolina, Amaney A. Jamal and Mark Tessler. 2015. 'Elections in the Arab world: Why do citizens turn out?' *Comparative Political Studies* 48 (11): 1355–1388.
- Desrués, Thierry and Saïd Kirhlani. 2013. 'Activism under authoritarianism: young political militants in Meknes'. *The Journal of North African Studies* 18 (5): 753–767.
- Dhillon, Navtej and Tarik Yousef. 2009. *Generation in the Waiting: The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East*. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.
- Doherty, David, Peter J. Schraeder and Kirstie L. Dobbs. 2019. 'Do democratic revolutions "activate" participants? The case of Tunisia'. *Politics*. Online first at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395719840240>
- El-Sharnouby, Dina. 2018. 'New social movements: The case of youth's political project in Egypt. Comparing the 1919 and 2011 Revolutions'. *Middle East Law and Governance* 10 (3): 264–290.
- Erich, Haggai. 2015. *Youth & Revolution in the Changing Middle East, 1908–2014*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- France, Alan and Steven Roberts. 2015. 'The problem of social generations: A critique of the new emerging orthodoxy in youth studies'. *Journal of Youth Studies* 18 (2): 215–230.
- Harb, Mona. 2016. 'Youth mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating exclusion and seeds for collective action'. *Power2Youth Working Papers*, 16. Rome: IAI.
- Herrera, Linda and Asef Bayat. 2010. *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hinnebusch, Raymond A. 2017. 'Political parties in MENA: Their functions and development'. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 44 (2): 159–175.
- Hoffman, Michael and Amaney Jamal. 2012. 'The youth and the Arab Spring: Cohort differences and similarities'. *Middle East Law and Governance* 4 (1): 168–188.
- IFES. 2011. *Elections in Tunisia: The 2011 Constituent Assembly*. Available at: www.ifes.org/publications/elections-tunisia-2011-constituent-assembly (accessed August 28, 2019).
- Jankowski, James P. 1967. *The Young Egypt Party and Egyptian Nationalism, 1933–1945*. Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press.
- Khalaf, Samir and Roseanne Saad Khalaf. 2011. *Arab Youth: Social Mobilisation in Times of Risk*. London: Saqi Books.
- Lust, Ellen. 2001. 'The decline of Jordanian political parties: Myth or reality?' *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 33 (04): 545–569.
- Marks, Monica. 2013. 'Youth politics and Tunisian Salafism: Understanding the Jihadi current'. *Mediterranean Politics* 18 (1): 104–111.
- Martinez, Luis. 2010. 'Youth, the Street and Violence in Algeria'. In Roel Meijer (ed.) *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth: Between Family, State and Street*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- Meijer, Roel. 2000. *Alienation or Integration of Arab Youth: Between Family, State and Street*. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- al-Mershed, Abbas M. 2010. 'The Islamic Movement and its Chances of Developing into a Party: The Case of al-Wefâq National Islamic Society in Bahrain'. In Myriam Catusse and Karam Karam (eds.) *Returning to Political Parties? Political Party Development in the Arab World*. Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo.

- Moaddel, Mansoor and Julie de Jong. 2017. 'Youth Perceptions and Values during the Arab Spring: Crossnational Variation and Trends'. In Mansoor Moaddel and Michele J. Gelfand (eds.) *Values, Political Action, and Change in the Middle East and the Arab Spring*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Murphy, Emma C. 2012. 'Problematizing Arab youth: Generational narratives of systemic failure'. *Mediterranean Politics* 17(1): 5–22.
- Norris, Pippa. 2009. 'Political Activism: New Challenges, New Opportunities'. In Carles Boix and Susan C. Stokes (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook for Comparative Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roberts, Ken. 2015. 'Youth mobilisations and political generations: Young activists in political change movements during and since the twentieth century'. *Journal of Youth Studies* 18 (8): 1–17.
- Resta, Valeria. 2018. 'Leftist Parties in the Arab Region before and after the Arab Uprisings: "Unrequited Love"?' In Francesco Cavatorta and Lise Storm (eds.) *Political Parties in the Arab World: Continuity and Change*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Salih, Ruba, Lynn Welchman, and Elena Zambelli. 2017. 'Gender, Intersectionality and Youth Policies in the South and East Mediterranean'. *Power2Youth Working Papers*. Rome: IAI.
- Sika, Nadine. 2017. *Youth Activism and Contentious Politics in Egypt: Dynamics of Continuity and Change*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sika, Nadine, 2012. 'Youth political engagement in Egypt: From abstention to uprising'. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 39 (2): 181–199.
- Singerman, Diane. 2007. 'The economic imperatives of marriage: Emerging practices and identities among youth in the Middle East'. *The Middle East Youth Initiative Working Paper* (2007–6).
- Somi, Omar. 2016. Youth policy in Tunisia: The internationalization of youth as a public policy issue. *Power2Youth Working Papers*, 9. Rome: IAI.
- Sukarieh, Maysoun and Stuart Tannock. 2014. *Youth Rising? The Politics of Youth in the Global Economy*. New York: Routledge.
- Tessler, Mark A. and Mary E. Keppel. 1976. 'Political Generations'. In Russel A. Stone and John Simmons (eds.) *Change in Tunisia: Studies in the Social Sciences*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Thomas, Catherine. 2018. 'Civic Engagement in the Middle East and North Africa'. Arab Barometer IV Topic Report, available at www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/PublicOpinion_CivicEngagement_MiddleEast_NorthAfrica_2018.pdf
- Thyen, Kressen. 2018. 'Managing contention: Government responses to youth protests in the Arab world'. *Middle East Law and Governance* 10 (1): 91–116.
- Thyen, Kressen and Johannes Gerschewski. 2018. 'Legitimacy and protest under authoritarianism: Explaining student mobilization in Egypt and Morocco during the Arab uprisings'. *Democratization* 25 (1): 38–57.
- Whiteley, Paul F. 2011. 'Is the party over? The decline of party activism and membership across the democratic world'. *Party Politics* 17 (1): 21–44.
- Wolf, Anne. 2018. 'What are 'Secular' Parties in the Arab world? Insights from Tunisia's Nidaa Tounes and Morocco's PAM'. In Francesco Cavatorta and Lise Storm (eds.) *Political Parties in the Arab World: Continuity and Change*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Yaghi, Mohammad. 2018. 'Why did Tunisian and Egyptian Youth Activists Fail to build Competitive Political Parties?' In Francesco Cavatorta and Lise Storm (eds.) *Political Parties in the Arab World: Continuity and Change*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Zerhouni, Saloua. 2019. 'Jeunes et politique au Maroc: les motifs de la non participation institutionnelle'. *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterraneos* 26: 43–54.