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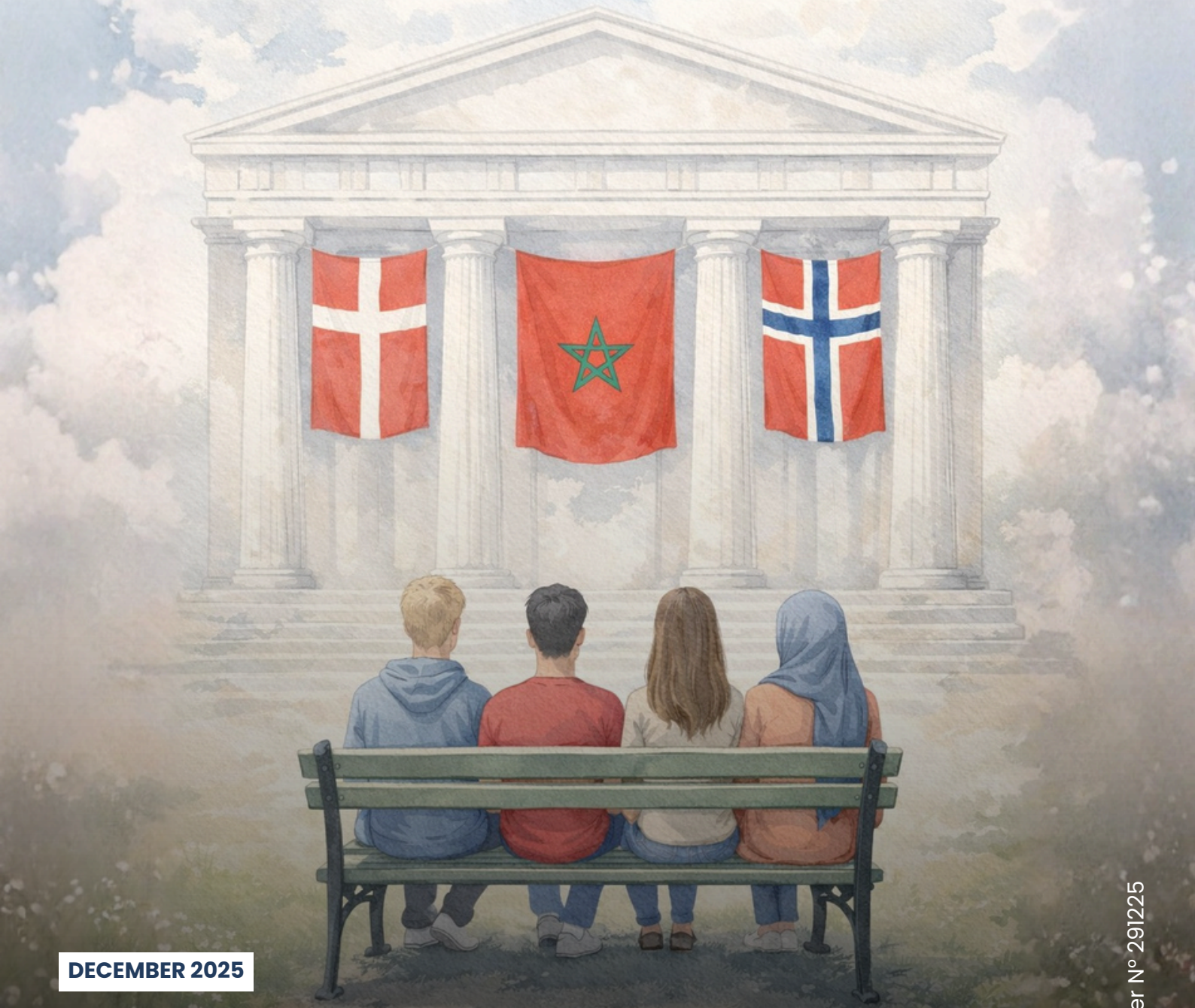
DO YOUTH TRUST POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS?

Evidence From Denmark, Norway, And Morocco



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Do Youth Trust Political Institutions?
Evidence From Denmark, Norway, And Morocco

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Abstract: This paper examines how young people in Norway, Denmark, and Morocco perceive political institutions, trust, and opportunities for engagement, and explores which elements of high-trust political environments could inform youth participation strategies in Morocco. Drawing on qualitative survey data from Scandinavian respondents and a large national youth dataset from Morocco, the study employs a thematic comparative approach to analyze four dimensions of youth political experience: institutional trust, perceived influence, communication and responsiveness of political actors, and preferred participation channels. The findings reveal clear divergences between the Scandinavian and Moroccan contexts. Norwegian and Danish youth evaluate political communication more positively, express higher confidence in their ability to influence public decisions, and attribute more civic-oriented motives to political actors. Moroccan youth, by contrast, report greater dissatisfaction with political communication, limited belief in institutional responsiveness, and higher reliance on informal or digital modes of expression. The study concludes that sustainable youth engagement depends not on one-time initiatives but on consistent institutional behaviors that demonstrate transparency, accessibility, and willingness to listen.

Keywords: Youth Political Engagement, Institutional Trust, Political Communication, Comparative Politics, Civic Participation, Public governance

I. INTRODUCTION

Across different societies, young people are negotiating their place in public life in ways that often say more about the political systems surrounding them than about the youth themselves (Norris, 2011a). Some grow up with institutions that feel familiar and trustworthy, almost like an extension of the community they already belong to. Others encounter political spaces that seem distant, formal, and at times indifferent to their concerns (Rothstein & Stolle, 2008; OECD, 2020). This paper begins from a simple but persistent observation: youth engagement is shaped not only by personal motivation, but by the tone and quality of the political world they inherit.

Although global reports often describe a generation turning away from formal politics (International IDEA, 2019), this narrative hides profound differences between countries. Scandinavian democracies continue to nurture confidence and participation among young citizens (Sønderskov, 2011), while countries like Morocco witness frustration, mistrust, and a shift toward informal or digital modes of expression (Maghraoui, 2017a). Yet these realities are rarely brought into direct conversation with one another. The gap this paper seeks to fill lies precisely in this missing comparison: what happens when we place these contrasting trust cultures side by side, and ask what they reveal about how political engagement is built, and how it breaks?

Youth Political Engagement and Trust: A Comparative Context

Years of comparative research, whether from political sociologists like Pippa Norris (2011b) or public governance scholars like Bo Rothstein (2005), suggest that trust acts as the silent infrastructure beneath political life. When it is strong, participation feels natural. When it is fragile, even basic interactions with institutions become uncertain. In high-trust societies, political socialization begins early and often quietly, woven into school routines, local communities, and everyday encounters with public services. In lower-trust contexts, young people learn instead to navigate caution, distance, and the feeling that their voices may not carry far beyond their immediate circles (Seligson, 2002; Ekman et al., 2012).

This broad contrast helps situate the three countries examined here. Norway and Denmark represent long-standing traditions of transparency and civic equality, where young people learn early that institutions can be approached rather than avoided (OECD, 2022). Morocco stands at another point in the spectrum, where institutional communication often fails to bridge the distance between the state and its youth, leaving many young people politically aware yet hesitant to engage formally (Arab Barometer, 2022).

Norway: Institutional Trust and Youth Political Socialization

Norway offers a clear example of how political engagement can grow naturally from a culture of trust (OECD, 2023a). What stands out in the Norwegian context is not a single policy but a way of thinking about youth: young people are not seen as future citizens but as present ones (Norwegian Ministry of Children and Families, 2021). Civic education is integrated into everyday schooling, not treated as an abstract subject but connected to real political processes, sometimes even involving direct interactions with local councils (Børhaug, 2020).

Municipal youth councils have become more than symbolic bodies. They are spaces where teenagers learn, slowly and sometimes imperfectly, that they can influence public decisions (Heggen et al., 2019). Party youth wings, which are unusually active in Norway, provide another avenue for involvement, one that treats young voices as politically meaningful rather than decorative (Allern et al., 2021). Researchers like Kari Steen-Johnsen (2019) have described this environment as one in which public institutions are not only transparent but also genuinely curious about the perspectives of younger generations. As a result, many Norwegian youths grow up with the feeling that politics is something they can enter without needing permission (Enjolras, 2020).

Denmark: Social Cohesion, Equality, and Youth Engagement

Denmark shares much with Norway, but carries its own distinctive tone. Danish political culture is built on a deep sense of social equality that is felt as much as it is taught (OECD, 2023b). Trust is not something children learn from textbooks, but something they absorb from the way schools, municipalities, and public services treat them (Christensen et al., 2020). The everyday experience of fairness becomes a quiet lesson in democracy.

Danish political communication toward youth is remarkably direct. Government agencies regularly target young audiences in a language that feels accessible rather than bureaucratic (Danish Ministry of Children and Education, 2023). The strong presence of youth wings across almost all political parties reinforces this sense of belonging. Young Danes often describe engagement not as a duty but as something that feels intuitive, part of the social fabric that holds communities together (Bengtsson et al., 2019). Scholars like Lars Torpe (2018) explain that this cohesion is one of Denmark's strongest democratic assets: it allows youth participation to flourish not through pressure, but through trust and recognition.

Morocco: Youth Disengagement, Institutional Mistrust, and Structural Barriers

The Moroccan case unfolds very differently. For many young people, political life is present but feels out of reach (Khosrokhavar, 2022). Studies from the Arab Barometer (2022) , along with the longitudinal press review carried out by the Youth Policy Center (2016; 2021), highlight a recurring theme: Moroccan youth rarely lack political awareness, but they often lack confidence that institutions will listen or respond. This mistrust does not come from nowhere. It grows in a context shaped by high unemployment, regional disparities, and the everyday pressures that accompany young adulthood (World Bank, 2021).

As formal channels struggle to capture youth voices, social media fills the void (El Idrissi, 2020). Platforms become the closest thing to an open political space, a place where young Moroccans express frustration, mobilize around causes, or simply observe the political landscape without feeling the need to participate formally (Aouragh, 2022). Researchers like Driss Maghraoui (2017b) have noted that this creates a paradox: Morocco has a politically conscious youth population, yet institutional participation remains weak. The gap lies not in interest but in trust, and in the absence of consistent and meaningful communication from the state.

It is worth noting that the selection of Norway, Denmark, and Morocco follows a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD), allowing the study to examine how youth political engagement unfolds under sharply contrasting institutional and trust environments. Norway and Denmark represent high-trust democracies with long-standing traditions of youth inclusion, decentralized governance, and institutional transparency, while Morocco represents a context where youth political awareness is high but institutional trust and formal participation remain comparatively weaker. For this reason, placing these three contexts next to each other reveals more than a comparison of political systems. It shows how trust, communication, and daily experience shape the texture of political life. This contrast exposes the core question this paper seeks to explore: how do political environments teach young people to trust or to hesitate, to participate or to withdraw? And what can each model reveal about the conditions that make democratic engagement possible?

II. METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the methodological approach used to investigate how young people across Norway, Denmark, and Morocco perceive political institutions, trust, and opportunities for engagement. It details the sampling strategy, data collection procedures, and analytical framework that guided the study. Given the exploratory and comparative nature of the research, the methodology combines qualitative survey data from Scandinavian respondents with a large youth dataset from Morocco, and applies a thematic comparative analysis to identify cross-national patterns and interpret divergences in youth political behavior and institutional trust.

1. Research Objectives and Questions

CARDINAL RESEARCH QUESTION

What makes young people in Norway and Denmark trust political institutions, and which elements of this trust could realistically inspire and strengthen youth engagement and institutional trust in Morocco?	
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	**CORRESPONDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. Examine how youth in Norway, Denmark, and Morocco perceive political institutions, political actors, and institutional communication.	1.1. How do youth in each country evaluate institutional communication (clarity, accessibility, transparency)? 1.2. How do young people perceive politicians' intentions (societal interest vs. Personal interest) across the three contexts?
2. Compare perceived influence and the availability of political and civic participation channels across the three countries.	2.1. To what extent do youth in each context believe they can influence public decisions, inside or outside political parties? 2.2. Which channels (social media, NGOs, political parties, councils) do youth consider most effective for making their voices heard, and why?
3. Identify sociopolitical and structural factors shaping youth engagement and trust in institutions across the three national contexts.	3.1. What structural conditions (education, socioeconomic pressures, civic culture, trust norms) shape youth engagement differently in Scandinavia and Morocco? 3.2. How do youth categories (politically active, NGO-engaged, disengaged) perceive opportunities and barriers to participation?
4. Analyze the gaps between Scandinavian models of institutional trust and the Moroccan model, focusing on what can be adapted or transferred.	4.1. Which Scandinavian mechanisms of trust-building (e.g., civic education, routine youth inclusion, institutional transparency) appear relevant and adaptable to the Moroccan context? 4.2. Which Moroccan-specific constraints may limit transferability, and how can they be addressed?
5. Develop evidence-based recommendations to strengthen institutional trust and political engagement among Moroccan youth.	5.1. Based on comparative findings, what institutional, communicational, or participatory reforms could increase Moroccan youths' trust in public institutions? 5.2. What practical, immediately implementable measures can bridge the gap between youth expectations and institutional performance in Morocco?

Table 1: Research Objectives and their Corresponding Research Questions

2. Sampling Scheme

The study employs a mixed sampling strategy combining primary survey data from Norway and Denmark with a large, secondary dataset on Moroccan youth political engagement. The Scandinavian component consists of 61 respondents, 31 from Norway and 30 from Denmark, aged between 18 and 35. To ensure analytical diversity and capture the range of youth engagement patterns observed in both contexts, a stratified purposive sampling approach was

adopted. Participants were selected across three engagement profiles: youth who are politically active through party structures or electoral involvement; youth primarily engaged in civil society or NGO-related activities; and politically disengaged youth with limited or indirect participation. This stratification strategy ensured balanced representation of different trust perceptions, participation trajectories, and exposure to institutional communication, thereby enhancing the comparative value of the sample despite its non-probabilistic nature.

The Moroccan component of the study draws on a large national dataset comprising more than 2000 young respondents aged 18 to 35. The sample includes individuals from all twelve administrative regions of the country, with documented demographic variation and balanced gender distribution. Although the underlying sampling procedure used to generate this dataset is not explicitly specified, the breadth of regional coverage and the size of the sample allow for meaningful analytical comparisons. For the purposes of this study, the Moroccan dataset is treated as a regionally dispersed, large-scale convenience sample that provides substantial insight into national patterns of trust, voting behavior, political communication, and perceived opportunities for participation.

To preserve cross-national comparability, both datasets were aligned along core analytical dimensions, including age cohort, degree of youth engagement, and key indicators related to institutional trust, influence, and participation channels. This alignment allows for the systematic examination of similarities and divergences across the three national contexts while acknowledging the methodological constraints associated with each sampling design.

3. Data Collection

Data for this study were collected through qualitative survey instruments administered across the three national contexts. Although the surveys included closed-ended items to allow descriptive comparison, the primary objective of the instruments was exploratory: to capture youth interpretations, perceptions, motivations, and subjective evaluations regarding political engagement, institutional trust, and channels of participation.

In Norway and Denmark, data were gathered through online self-administered questionnaires distributed to young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. The survey consisted of a series of evaluative and perception-based items designed to elicit respondents' views on institutional trustworthiness, political communication, opportunities for influence, and motivations for voting or abstaining. The questions mirrored the analytical themes of the study, including perceptions of politicians' intentions (e.g., whether political actors act in the public interest or personal interest), evaluations of communication efforts, and assessments of the most effective means for young people to make their voices heard. Respondents also reflected on their own engagement profile, allowing a nuanced categorization of political involvement. The survey design was intentionally concise and accessible, favoring interpretive responses that capture perceptual tendencies rather than statistically generalizable indicators.

Data from Morocco were obtained using a large national survey administered to young people aged 18 to 35 across all twelve regions of the country. The instrument covers a wide set of themes, including motivations for voting or not voting, perceptions of institutional communication, trust in elected versus non-elected institutions, and preferred mechanisms for expressing political opinions. Several items in the questionnaire invite respondents to explain reasons for disengagement, perceptions of institutional distance, or evaluations of the effectiveness of

participatory channels such as social media, associations, or political parties. While the Moroccan survey includes categorical response options, the content of the items is interpretive in nature, targeting underlying attitudes, political reasoning, and lived experiences of engagement. The dataset, therefore, lends itself to qualitative interpretation despite its scale.

Across all contexts, the surveys were designed to be completed independently by respondents without interviewer intervention. This allowed participants to articulate their perceptions without social desirability pressure and enabled the study to capture subjective evaluations of political life, institutional trust, and youth agency. The unified thematic structure across the instruments, focusing on trust, influence, participation channels, and political communication, ensured coherence in cross-national comparison and supported the qualitative analytical approach adopted in the study.

4. Analytical Approach

The analysis follows a thematic comparative approach suitable for examining qualitative, perception-based survey data across multiple national contexts. Because the study seeks to understand how young people interpret institutional trust, political communication, and opportunities for influence, the analytical process focused on identifying and comparing recurring themes emerging from the Norwegian, Danish, and Moroccan responses.

First, all survey items were reviewed to identify core analytical dimensions grounded in both the literature and the structure of the questionnaires. Four overarching themes were retained as the analytical framework: (i) institutional trust, (ii) perceived influence and political efficacy, (iii) communication and responsiveness of political actors, and (iv) preferred channels of participation. These themes emerged consistently across the three contexts and reflect the central constructs of the research question.

Each dataset was then examined through an inductive coding process, during which participant responses, whether expressed through categorical choices or short open-ended explanations, were grouped into these thematic categories. Coding focused on capturing evaluative orientations rather than quantifying occurrences, which allowed the analysis to reflect youth reasoning, perceptions, and subjective interpretations. The themes were subsequently compared across Norway, Denmark, and Morocco in order to identify convergences and divergences in political trust, engagement patterns, and perceptions of institutional openness.

Finally, the comparative findings were interpreted in light of the institutional, social, and political contexts of each country. Scandinavian responses were analyzed for recurring features associated with high-trust environments, while Moroccan responses were examined for structural or communicational factors contributing to disengagement and institutional distance. This combination of thematic coding and cross-national comparison allows for a nuanced understanding of youth political engagement and provides a coherent analytical basis for the policy recommendations presented later in the report.

III. FINDINGS

The findings presented in this section outline the main patterns that emerged from the comparative analysis of youth perceptions across Denmark, Norway, and Morocco. Drawing on survey data from the three national contexts, the results summarize how young people evaluate

political communication, their perceived ability to influence public decisions, levels of trust in political actors, and the channels they consider most effective for political expression. The subsections below describe these patterns descriptively, providing the empirical foundation for the analytical discussion that follows.

Youth Perceptions of Political Communication and Responsiveness

Perceptions of political communication provide an important indication of how young people evaluate the accessibility and visibility of political actors. The survey results reveal distinct cross-national patterns regarding the extent to which youth consider political parties and the political elite to be making efforts to engage with younger generations. These perceptions help illustrate the baseline communicative environment within which youth form attitudes toward institutions and political participation.

	Denmark	**Norway**	**Morocco**
Good	*30,00%*	*16,13%*	*1,68%*
There are efforts	*46,67%*	*45,16%*	*19,66%*
Insufficient	*16,67%*	*12,90%*	*55,18%*
Absent	*6,67%*	*25,81%*	*23,48%*

Table 2: Perceptions of How Political Parties Communicate with Youth

As shown in Table 2, Danish and Norwegian respondents tend to evaluate political communication more positively than their Moroccan counterparts. In Denmark, 30% of respondents describe political communication with youth as "good," compared to 16.13% in Norway and only 1.68% in Morocco. The category receiving the highest endorsement in both Scandinavian samples is "there are efforts," with 46.67% in Denmark and 45.16% in Norway selecting this option. Morocco shows a lower proportion in this category, at 19.66%.

Conversely, Moroccan respondents report higher levels of dissatisfaction. A majority of 55.18% rate political communication as "insufficient," while an additional 23.48% consider it "absent." In Norway, 12.90% selected "insufficient" and 25.81% "absent," whereas in Denmark the distribution is notably lower at 16.67% "insufficient" and 6.67% "absent."

Briefly, the distribution across the four categories (good, there are efforts, insufficient, and absent) illustrates clear differences in how youth perceive political communication efforts across the three countries. Scandinavian respondents cluster more heavily around the positive and moderate categories, while Moroccan respondents are concentrated in the negative ones, suggesting a comparatively less favorable perception of communication practices.

Perceived Ability to Influence Public Decision-Making

	Denmark	**Norway**	**Morocco**
Possible	*83,33%*	*80,65%*	*57,47%*
Not Possible	*16,67%*	*19,35%*	*42,53%*

Table 3: Perception of Influencing Public Decisions Outside Political Parties

Moreover, the survey results shown in Figure 2 highlight clear differences in how youth across the three countries view their ability to influence public decisions outside political parties. In Denmark, a large majority (83.33%) indicate that influence is "possible," with only 16.67% expressing the opposite view. Norway displays a comparable pattern, where 80.65% report that influence is attainable and 19.35% consider it "not possible." On the other hand, the Moroccan responses present a more divided picture. While 57.47% believe that influence is possible, a substantial 42.53% state that it is not. The contrast between these proportions suggests a less cohesive perception among Moroccan youth regarding the accessibility of non-partisan influence pathways, especially when compared to the more consistent responses observed in Denmark and Norway.

It is worth emphasizing that the distributions across the three countries reveal substantial variation in youth perceptions of non-partisan influence. Whereas Danish and Norwegian respondents predominantly view alternative channels as capable of affecting public decisions, Moroccan respondents present a more balanced split between confidence and skepticism.

Youth Trust in Political Institutions and Political Actors

	Denmark	**Norway**	**Morocco**
Corrupt	*20,00%*	*9,68%*	*14,96%*
Think about their personal interest	*30,00%*	*29,03%*	*42,07%*
Think about the society's interest	*16,67%*	*41,94%*	*7,83%*
Open to listen to youth's opinion	*26,67%*	*19,35%*	*8,23%*
Do not listen to youth's opinion	*6,67%*	*0,00%*	*26,91%*

Table 4: Youth Perceptions of Politicians

Table 4 presents how respondents in Denmark, Norway, and Morocco evaluate political actors across five attitudinal categories that range from explicitly negative to more trust-affirming assessments. These categories, perceiving politicians as corrupt, motivated by personal interest, motivated by society's interest, open to listening to youth, or not listening to youth, capture distinct dimensions of institutional trust, including perceived integrity, representational motives, and responsiveness. The distribution of responses across these evaluative markers reveals notable contrasts between the three national contexts.

In Denmark, 20% of respondents describe politicians as "corrupt," while 30% believe they act primarily in their personal interest. Smaller shares attribute more positive characteristics: 16.67% think politicians act in the interest of society, and 26.67% consider them open to listening to youth. Only 6.67% report that politicians do not listen to youth at all. Moreover, Norwegian respondents are more likely to associate politicians with positive motivations. A plurality (41.94%) indicate that politicians act in the interest of society, while 29.03% believe they act in their personal interest. Negative assessments are comparatively low: 9.68% describe politicians as corrupt, and none selected "do not listen to youth's opinion." Additionally, 19.35% perceive politicians as open to listening to youth.

The Moroccan responses display a different pattern. A relatively high proportion (42.07%) believe politicians act in their personal interest, and 14.96% describe them as corrupt. Fewer

respondents associate politicians with societal motives (7.83%) or openness to youth (8.23%). Notably, 26.91% state that politicians do not listen to youth's opinions, substantially higher than in both Scandinavian samples.

Taken together, it is important to mention that these distributions underline substantial variation in how youth evaluate the intentions and responsiveness of political actors, with more favorable assessments appearing in Norway, more mixed evaluations in Denmark, and more critical views in Morocco.

Preferred Channels of Participation and Political Expression

	Denmark	**Norway**	**Morocco**
Social media	*60,00%*	*83,87%*	*63,41%*
Non-governmental Organizations	*3,33%*	*0,00%*	*14,48%*
Political Parties	*30,00%*	*9,68%*	*12,80%*
None	*6,67%*	*3,23%*	*6,71%*
Other	*11,11%*	*3,23%*	*2,59%*

Table 5: Distribution of Youth-Identified Channels for Making Their Voices Heard

As shown in Table 5, the channels that respondents consider most effective for expressing their political views vary across the three countries. Social media appears as a prominent avenue, though to varying degrees. In Norway, 83.87% of respondents identify it as the most effective means of making their voices heard, followed by 63.41% in Morocco and 60% in Denmark. These figures indicate that digital platforms hold a significant place in youth repertoires of political expression.

Other channels receive more uneven endorsement. Participation through NGOs is selected by 14.48% of Moroccan respondents, compared with 3.33% in Denmark and 0% in Norway. Political parties are chosen by 30% of Danish respondents, 12.80% in Morocco, and 9.68% in Norway. A smaller share reports no effective channel ("none"), with 6.67% in Denmark, 3.23% in Norway, and 6.71% in Morocco selecting this option.

It is worth noting that the "other" category includes a variety of more specific mentions. Danish respondents reference demonstrations and lobbying as meaningful avenues for influence. Likewise, Norwegian respondents also mention demonstrations, alongside instances where participants felt no alternative means were available. In the Moroccan sample, several respondents indicated that there is no real way for youth to make their voices heard, reinforcing the presence of more pessimistic assessments within this context. In short, these distributions illustrate the range of channels youth consider available or effective for political expression, with notable cross-national differences in the prominence of institutional versus non-institutional forms.

IV. DISCUSSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Structural Lessons from the Scandinavian model

The findings from Norway and Denmark highlight a political ecosystem where youth engagement is not an isolated initiative but the outcome of long-term institutional routines. These routines

manifest in three mutually reinforcing dimensions: (1) Structured access points, (2) responsive public institutions, and (3) a broad social trust culture.

First, Scandinavian systems demonstrate that youth participation becomes meaningful when it is embedded in institutional processes rather than treated as a symbolic gesture. Youth wings of political parties are not parallel organizations but influential internal actors, shaping party programs and national debates. Similarly, municipal youth councils operate as advisory bodies with recognized channels of influence, allowing young people to develop political literacy through practical involvement. The Norwegian experience of integrating youth in local consultation procedures shows how participation becomes consequential when institutions signal that young people's perspectives carry weight.

Secondly, public sector responsiveness constitutes a central pillar of Scandinavian trust. Norway's "Trust Reform" ("Tillitsreformen"), adopted in 2022, illustrates this dynamic by reducing administrative micromanagement and granting frontline public servants greater professional autonomy (DFØ-notat, 2023, p. 1). The reform seeks to increase user-friendliness, improve the quality of public delivery, and strengthen the perceived proximity between citizens and state institutions. Although the reform primarily targets administrative efficiency, its underlying logic, governing through trust rather than control, contributes to a broader institutional environment in which youth expectations of transparency and responsiveness are most likely to be met.

Thirdly, high levels of social trust in Scandinavian societies create a favorable climate for political engagement. Survey data from the Norwegian Directorate for Administration and Financial Management (DFØ) consistently show a high degree of social trust across all regions in Norway (DFØ, 2025). This everyday interpersonal trust reinforces institutional trust; when individuals expect fairness and reliability in daily interactions, political institutions are perceived as extensions of the same social environment. For youth, this reduces psychological distance to political actors, making formal participation appear accessible rather than intimidating.

These structural features suggest that Scandinavian youth engagement is not merely the result of targeted youth policies, but of a deeply rooted governance culture in which transparency, equality, and responsiveness are taken for granted.

Morocco's Structural Constraints

When contrasted with the Moroccan context, the structural gap becomes evident. The Moroccan youth survey reveals high levels of political awareness but low levels of institutional trust and a limited belief in the effectiveness of formal participation channels. Several factors appear decisive:

Youth access to political institutions is uneven and largely informal. Many young people express the view that political parties act in their own interest, and a large share believe that politicians do not listen to youth. This perception is reinforced by the absence of institutionalized consultation mechanisms and limited visible interaction between young citizens and elected representatives;

Institutional communication does not reach young people effectively. The findings show that a majority of Moroccan youth describe political communication as insufficient or absent (See Table 2). In an environment where institutional messages are rare, unclear, or perceived as inauthentic, young citizens rely on alternative spaces, primarily social media, which encourage political expression but rarely facilitate institutional dialogue;

Socioeconomic pressures constrain engagement. High levels of youth unemployment and emigration aspirations shape political priorities. For many young Moroccans, quality of life and mobility concerns overshadow interest in long-term political participation. Structural inequalities between urban and rural regions further deepen disparities in access to political information, participation opportunities, and interaction with state authorities;

Morocco's institutional architecture is more centralized and less participatory, limiting young citizens' opportunities to influence local decision-making. Without routine channels, such as youth councils, public hearings, or structured consultations forums, engagement becomes dependent on individual initiative rather than institutional design.

Concurrently, these factors suggest that Moroccan youth disengagement is not driven by apathy but by a combination of structural exclusion, unmet expectations, and weak communicative links between institutions and young citizens.

Cross-Context Recommendations: What can Morocco Realistically Adopt?

Although Scandinavian political cultures cannot be replicated in its entirety, certain mechanisms appear adaptable to the Moroccan context, especially those that do not rely on high baseline levels of social trust.

1. Institutionalized youth consultation at the municipal level

In Scandinavian countries, local-level participation is where most young people first encounter the state in a meaningful way. This interaction matters because legitimacy is not built at the national level, but through repeated and visible experiences that show institutions are listening.

Youth councils or advisory panels, adapted to local realities, could provide structured channels for young people to articulate priorities on issues such as education, employment, digitalization, and urban development. These bodies would not require high trust levels to function but could gradually cultivate trust by demonstrating responsiveness.

Unlike one-off initiatives, institutionalized consultation creates a routine of interaction between youth and decision makers. Even if initial engagement is limited, the existence of a stable channel signals institutional openness and begins to reduce psychological distance between youth and the state.

2. Targeted youth communication strategies

One of the clearest findings in the comparative data is that Moroccan youth perceive political communication as either insufficient or entirely absent. Scandinavian institutions, by contrast, place significant emphasis on clarity, accessibility, and frequent communication, especially through digital channels.

Clear, accessible communication from political parties, ministries, and municipalities, especially through digital platforms, could address the current information gap. Communication units specializing in youth outreach could improve trust by reducing ambiguity and making institutional processes more transparent. Morocco could adopt a strategy that seeks to reach those goals by establishing:

- Dedicated youth communication units within ministries and municipalities,
- Standardized communication format,
- Transparency dashboards showing progress on youth-relevant policies,
- Regular briefings tailored to 18-30-year-olds,
- Simplified language guidelines for government communication.

Importantly, this is not merely public relations. In the Scandinavian model, communication is viewed as part of governance itself, where clarity strengthens institutional legitimacy.

By addressing information gaps, Morocco could reduce political ambiguity and counter the widespread perception that institutions are distant or unresponsive. Clear communication widens the circle of political understanding and makes institutions feel less opaque, an important factor for trust.

3. Integration of civic into everyday schooling

Scandinavian countries do not rely on formal trust-building campaigns. Instead, trust is cultivated gradually through education systems that socialize young people into democratic participation from an early age.

Introducing civic education modules linked to real political process, not merely constitutional theory, could strengthen political literacy and familiarize students with participation channels. Scandinavian experience shows that early engagement normalizes participation.

Consequently, Morocco could introduce a civic curriculum that is closer to Scandinavian practice by ensuring that civic education is linked to actual political processes (e.g., municipal visits, mock elections), can teach practical skills such as deliberation, critical thinking, and collective problem-solving, it includes encounters with local officials or civil servants, and is taught through participatory methods rather than rote learning.

This form of civic education does not require consensus on ideological content. It simply provides young people with the vocabulary, skills, and familiarity needed to navigate political systems. Over time, increased political literacy can convert political awareness into political confidence.

4. Strengthening local governance as primary youth entry points

In Scandinavia, local government is the everyday face of the state, Municipalities are where young people access services, interact with institutions, and encounter public officials. This everyday proximity is one of the strongest drivers of trust.

For Morocco, strengthening local governance as a primary youth contact point could involve: youth coordinators within municipalities, open office hours or youth days for direct dialogue, municipal participation desks for young citizens, local reporting requirements on youth-related

issues, participatory budgeting for youth projects, and/or small-scale grants for youth-led local initiatives.

These mechanisms are powerful because they make the state tangible. When youth see that their input can lead to real changes, such as renovated playgrounds, a safer street, or improved public transport, they begin to perceive institutions as accessible and responsive.

Furthermore, rather than relying on national-level reforms, which are slow and politically sensitive, local youth participation structures offer a pragmatic, low-cost, feasible pathway to gradually rebuilding trust where it matters most: in everyday life.

Long-term Strategies for Policy Adaptation

Not all features of the Scandinavian model can be transplanted to Morocco. Several core Scandinavian mechanisms rest on long-standing structural preconditions, both socially, politically, and administratively, that have developed over decades. Attempting to copy these mechanisms without first addressing their foundations risks failure or unintended consequences.

1. High baseline social trust

Scandinavian civic life is underpinned by high interpersonal trust. Previously mentioned studies suggest a high level of social trust among citizens. This trust amplifies institutional trust because everyday interactions with others and with public services are generally fair, predictable and low-cost to engage in.

Social trust is not a policy lever that can be flipped. It is an emergent property of long historical processes. Sustained equality of opportunity, reliable welfare provision, low perceived corruption, inclusive public narratives and routine, fair interactions between citizens and institutions. These conditions have evolved over generations in Scandinavia and cannot be created quickly through isolated institutional reforms.

Incremental mitigation strategies:

(i) Prioritize trust-building practices that are procedural and visible. This signal reliabilities, even where social trust is low;

(ii) Use small, repeatable successes, short time horizon projects with visible outcomes to create micro-evidence of responsiveness that can slowly change expectations;

(iii) Invest in local accountability mechanisms that explicitly reduce the perceived risk of local capture and thereby lower the social costs of participation;

(iv) Foster intergenerational and cross-community exchanges, such as school partnerships, regional youth forums, that can slowly expand patterns of reciprocal trust.

2. Deep institutional decentralization

Municipalities in Norway and Denmark enjoy substantial operational and fiscal autonomy, professionalized administrations, and well-developed accountability systems. This combination allows local governments to exercise discretion (freedom with responsibility) while remaining

accountable for outcomes. Trust-based reforms (e.g., Tillitsreformen) presuppose competent, transparent local administrations that can manage greater autonomy responsibly.

Incremental mitigation strategies:

(i) Sequence reforms: begin with delegated pilot projects rather than blanket decentralization;

(ii) Target municipalities with minimum capacity thresholds to demonstrate viability;

(iii) Pair decentralization with capacity building: invest in municipal professional development, financial management systems, and e-governance tools before expanding autonomy;

(iv) Design conditional autonomy: local discretion tied to agreed-upon performance indicators and transparent reporting, creating upward and downward accountability simultaneously.

In a nutshell, the discussion highlights that youth engagement is not the product of isolated interventions but of institutional environments that keep constantly demonstrating openness, fairness, and responsiveness. On the one hand, the Scandinavian cases show how trust grows when young people encounter political systems that actively recognize their perspectives, on the other hand, while the Moroccan case underscores how disengagement can emerge when communication is limited, participation channels are unclear, or institutional experiences fail to meet youth expectations (See Table 4-5). Furthermore, the recommendations proposed here, ranging from municipal-level consultation mechanisms to strengthened communication practices, civic education reform, and more accessible local governance, reflect strategies that Morocco can realistically implement within its current structural constraints. It is important to mention, however, that although the deeper foundations of the Scandinavian model cannot be replicated wholesale, gradual and visible reforms can begin to rebuild the connective tissue between youth and institutions. Ultimately, the path forward lies in creating a political environment where Moroccan youth encounter not symbolic gestures, but concrete, repeated experiences that demonstrate that their voices matter and that engagement can lead to meaningful outcomes.

Finally, it is important to stress that the recommendations derived from this comparative analysis are not intended as direct institutional transfers. Their applicability to the Moroccan context depends on conditions of transferability, including local administrative capacity, degrees of institutional decentralization, and the credibility of political communication toward youth. Rather than replicating Scandinavian models, the findings point to the value of incremental, context-sensitive adaptations, where trust is built through repeated and visible institutional practices over time.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This report set out to understand what makes young people in both Norway and Denmark trust political institutions, and how selected elements of these trust-building mechanisms could inspire youth engagement in Morocco. With both national survey data and comparative findings' analysis, the study has shown that youth trust is not a function of individual attitudes alone but emerges from the interaction between structural conditions, institutional practices, and everyday experience of the state.

Across all contexts, the findings confirm that political awareness among youth is high. What differs is whether this awareness translates into formal engagement and trust in institutional responsiveness. In Norway and Denmark, young people encounter institutions that signal openness, transparency, and a willingness to listen. This is reinforced by predictable public services, well-developed youth wings in political parties, and a governance culture in which responsiveness is not exceptional but expected. These features create an environment where participation feels meaningful, inclusion is highly valued thereby access to make change is reachable and where trust is continuously reproduced through lived experience.

The Moroccan case highlights a different dynamic. Young Moroccans are politically conscious and attentive to national issues, yet they report low levels of trust, weak perceptions of institutional responsiveness, and limited belief that formal participation channels can produce change. Survey data reveal that youth often view political actors as motivated by personal, rather than, societal interests, and many perceive institutional communication as insufficient or absent. Consequently, social media, rather than political parties, municipalities, or formal councils, becomes the primary arena for political expression, even though it rarely provides meaningful, in-depth or thoughtful pathways to influence. These patterns point to a structure rather than an attitude gap. The problem is not youth disengagement, but institutional distance.

The comparative findings make it clear that Morocco cannot simply replicate the Scandinavian trust model. Social trust, positive experiences with local governance and deep decentralization are the product of long historical trajectories that cannot be recreated through isolated reforms. But the analyses show that some Scandinavian mechanisms are transferable when adapted to Morocco's institutional context. These include municipal youth consultation structures, targeted youth communication strategies, integration of civic learning into everyday schooling, and partnerships with NGOs as intermediaries for youth participation. What unites these mechanisms is that they do not require pre-existing high social trust, they are designed to build trust gradually through repeated, visible, and concrete interactions.

The policy implications are therefore twofold. First, Morocco can adopt a set of low-cost, feasible reforms that expand youth access to institutions and improve the clarity and visibility of political communication. These reforms have the potential to generate early, measurable improvements in youth perceptions of institutional responsiveness. Second, long-term trust-building requires a gradual strengthening of local governance capacity and a shift toward more transparent, accountability-driven public administration. Trust is not an input into reform, rather it is an outcome of consistent performance over time by both local and national government.

All in all, the cross-national comparison underlines that youth trust grows where institutions are accessible, predictable, and meaningfully open to influence. Strengthening youth trust in Morocco does not require a Scandinavian model, rather it requires institutions that acknowledge youth as present citizens with legitimate expectations. By gradually building channels for inclusion, improving communication, and demonstrating responsiveness in everyday governance, Moroccan decision makers can lay the foundation for a new trust relationship between youth and the state. In the long run, this relationship will be essential not only for institutional legitimacy but for Morocco's broader social and democratic development in its entirety.

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