Perspectives

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The point of view

Morocco's politicised youth are forcing the country to reckon with its contradictions

After Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal[1] and, more recently, Madagascar, Morocco's Gen Z has arisen under the banner "GenZ212" (212 is Morocco's international dialling code). This generation, born between 1997 and 2012, is riding the wave of a transnational uprising fuelled by aspirations for dignity and the rejection of old-style politics. In Morocco, this movement was born out of a general feeling of revolt after eight women died at a hospital in Agadir in September following Caesarean deliveries. It has come to symbolise the deterioration in public services. The movement quickly organised itself on social network Discord, with demonstrations taking place from 27 September onwards.

What's surprising is how this online chat platform, mainly dedicated to gaming, has mutated into a genuine tool for political organisation, a kind of virtual parliament. Despite criticisms of a movement with no union representation, political party, leader or structure, the reality is that **political awareness is high, collective power is being organised in new ways – a virtual participative democracy that represents a break from the traditional political architecture** – and the movement's leaders are choosing to remain anonymous. Discussion sessions are held every night, with moderators and note-takers. Anyone can ask to speak and each and all the movement's decisions are put to the vote. One might thus feel a degree of admiration for this grassroots learning beyond the school gates, commitment and political organisation (take it from a millennial!). **From Asia to Africa, these movements seem to indicate that the breakneck development of digital technologies will not necessarily and primarily be to the benefit of elites, who find it more difficult to navigate the landscape of political expression.** In this sense, the Moroccan authorities are struggling to understand the movement and trying to bring it back within the institutional framework that governs political participation.

Street rallies clearly highlight the paradoxical situation in which the country now finds itself, with all its contradictions: a situation in which an "emerging Morocco" is confronted with a "two-speed Morocco". But what's the reality behind these two slogans? And how does the education sector, cornerstone of social mobility, perfectly illustrate this paradox?

"Emerging Morocco": aiming to be a middle power

In many respects, **Morocco is firmly positioned as one of the region's middle powers**. Despite the recurrence and violence of recent shocks (Covid, the inflationary shock of the war in Ukraine, earthquake, repeated droughts, etc.), the country has established itself as an anchor of economic and political stability, whether seen as part of West Africa, North Africa or the Arab world[2]. Economically speaking, **Morocco has cleverly inserted itself into the European nearshoring landscape**, enabling it to develop new export-oriented sectors and attract investment in industries like automotive, aerospace and textiles. And this strategy is clearly starting to bear fruit. Over the period 2021-2024, exports of goods and services on average accounted for 41% of GDP, compared with 33.5% over the period 2016-2020[3]. **Morocco is benefiting as the new wave of "globalisation among friends" reconfigures production chains, leveraging its growing diplomatic influence.**

[1] Read our article: "Népal : dans Katmandou calciné, la sortie de crise semble un nouvel Everest à gravir", September 2025.
[2] Read our article: "Morocco: We can do it!", May 2025.
[3] "Morocco Economic Monitor: Prioritizing Reforms to Boost the Business Environment", World Bank, winter 2025.

One cannot help but note the recent strengthening of the European and, above all, US position on the issue of the Western Sahara, underpinned by the Abraham Accords signed in 2020. **But Moroccan diplomacy is also working to diversify its partners, adroitly navigating the new paradigm of a fragmenting global order.** Not only has the country forged a strategic partnership with Russia and secured its place in China's Belt and Road initiative, it has also strengthened ties with the Gulf States and consolidated its economic network in Africa. Morocco is attempting to maximise the benefits of this balancing act (Israeli technology; US umbrella; European export markets and investment; financial support from the Gulf States) as it negotiates a complex situation (briefly participating in the war in Yemen but remaining neutral on the boycott of Qatar[4]; balancing the Abraham Accords against a strategy of co-opting the Muslim Brotherhood; abstaining from certain UN votes condemning Russia for its role in the conflict; etc.).

Lastly, Morocco is leveraging soft power to consolidate its strategy of attaining the status of a middle power. There are a number of cards Morocco can play, including promoting its rich cultural and touristic heritage, organising festivals and leveraging its elite diaspora. More recently, it has been investing huge amounts of effort in sports soft power: it organised the Africa Cup of Nations 2025, its national team was a semi-finalist in the 2022 World Cup, and it is jointly hosting the 2030 World Cup alongside Spain and Portugal.

However, this latter point has created some unease that has come to almost symbolise the youth uprising: **there is no denying the sense of national pride fuelled by major sports events such as these**. **Yet, how is it that a country can marshal considerable resources to conjure up brand new sports stadiums in record time, yet people still die in hospital from routine medical procedures?** "We want hospitals and schools, not just stadiums", chant Morocco's young people. This is reminiscent of the "Fifa Go Home" protests in Brazil in 2014.

"Two-speed Morocco": the challenge of inclusive growth

Without detracting from Morocco's achievements over the past few years, a closer look at the economy suggests that **this image of an "emerging Morocco" is, in practice, not incompatible with deteriorating social conditions**.

Firstly, behind the narrative of Morocco as an anchor of stability, there is also the reality of a slowing economy. Having averaged 4.3% over the period 2004−2014, growth has subsequently flagged, averaging 2.5% over the period 2015−2024: a kind of cautious stagnation that seems to have long taken precedence over structural reform. **The result is a growth model that is not creating enough jobs[5].** And, despite the emergence of new sectors over the past few years, the increasingly water-stressed agricultural sector is, unfortunately, destroying jobs more quickly that nearshoring can create them in urban areas. This is a major social challenge: the agricultural sector accounts for around 38% of the workforce and as much as 50% of the female workforce, where the participation rate is already very low (less than 25%). Consequently, unemployment has reached record levels, rising to 13.3% in 2024, its highest since the 1990s.

Behind this model of stability, there is also the reality of a structurally oligopolistic private sector, reinforced by high barriers to entry. The Special Commission behind the diagnosis that formed the basis for the New Development Model mandated by Mohammed VI in 2021[6] identified cumbersome regulations implemented in a lax and arbitrary way, public-private collusion in the allocation of authorisations and access to land and financial resources, and anti-competitive practices that had gone unchallenged. **Its report noted "a partially locked economy, favouring vested interests and the maintenance of economic rents".** This situation incentivises informality and results in a lack of economic opportunities for a large proportion of young graduates. Young people aged between 15 and 25 – i.e. Gen Z – are by far the hardest hit by unemployment.

This is the key to understanding the GenZ212 movement's first demand: the resignation of the Akhannouch government. The billionaire businessman and heir to the Akwa Group, a privately owned conglomerate whose interests span the oil, real estate, tourism and media sectors, is the perfect embodiment of public-private collusion and the blurring of lines between business and politics. These are the mechanisms that

[4] "Entre le Maroc et les pays du Golfe, une proximité régulièrement mise à l'épreuve", Jeune Afrique, October 2025.
[5] See note 1.
[6] "The New Development Model: Releasing energies and regaining trust to accelerate the march of progress and prosperity for all", General Report by the Special Commission on the Development Model, April 2021.

have fuelled the development of a rentier economy for an entrepreneurial class that has become a social class in its own right.

To complete the picture, **public services are deteriorating and, in particular, schools and public hospitals are failing**. The rapid development of private healthcare and education services is accelerating this phenomenon by drawing away a portion of government spending and a majority of qualified personnel. This only adds to territorial and income inequalities and disparities in cultural capital.

All this describes a "two-speed Morocco". According to the National Observatory for Human Development[7], the relative poverty rate, which is the proportion of households whose annual expenditure per person is less than 60% of the national median, was 17.7% in 2019 – a rate that has not changed in 20 years, contrary to the promise of trickle-down economics. **This reflects deep inequalities in resource distribution, with the result that part of the population is living in poverty relative to other categories.** Moreover, in 2019, 45% of Moroccans considered themselves poor – a dominant feeling in the bottom eight income deciles, reflecting a strong sense of inequality.

The role of education in creating and perpetuating inequality

Educational inequalities are particularly harmful because they create multidimensional barriers for disadvantaged people that affect their health, work, income and well-being at the individual, family and social levels. This is where the state school system should work to remedy social inequalities and prevent their proliferation.

In 2019, the Special Commission's report sounded the alarm in relation to education and health: efforts to broaden access to education and healthcare were not matched by corresponding improvements in the quality of public services. **Morocco's education system continues to perform very poorly. In 2019, fewer than one third of students in state schools mastered the curriculum at the end of their primary education and barely 10% did so at the end of their lower secondary education.** Meanwhile, the school dropout rate remains very high. As a result, Morocco has tumbled down the PISA rankings: out of 81 countries in 2023, the kingdom came 76th for science and 79th for reading comprehension.

Faced with the deterioration of public education, more and more underprivileged families are opting for private education, diverting a significant proportion of their income away from basic consumer products. **A recent study published in Revue-IRS[8] found that the commodification of education had brought greater visibility to educational inequalities stemming from social inequality.**

Above all, though, this study sets out to demonstrate the **intergenerational persistence of educational attainment and socioeconomic status**. **This is a crucial point because it indicates that education is no longer functioning as a driver of social mobility.**

Our opinion – *Morocco currently faces a paradox, with two coexisting realities standing in opposition. On the one hand is an "emerging Morocco", which has established itself as an anchor of stability in the region, is focused on exports, has secured a role in European nearshoring and China's Belt and Road initiative, and is developing its diplomacy and leveraging its soft power; on the other is a "two-speed Morocco" where growth is no longer creating enough jobs to meet demand from young people entering the labour market, faltering public services (notably healthcare and education) are standing in the way of equal opportunities and hampering social mobility, and deep social and territorial inequalities persist. This diagnosis is no secret – it has featured in speeches by the king as well as reform documents (New Development Model) – but the mechanisms that maintain economic rents in the private sector are stubborn. It is those mechanisms that Morocco's Gen Z protesters, buoyed by the transnational youth revolt, are intent on denouncing. Without calling into question the monarchy itself, they are holding the government to account and, inspired by this summer's protests in Asia, using the tools of a connected youth to create new spaces for expression and political organisation.*

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[7] "Dynamiques des niveaux de vie et de la pauvreté au Maroc : une analyse longitudinale", ONDH.
[8] "Les inégalités d'opportunités dans l'accès à l'éducation au Maroc : une analyse empirique", Alazali and Bougroum, Revue Internationale de la Recherche Scientifique, 2024.

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