

Generation Z Protests: Morocco as a Mirror of Cairo's Authoritarian Fears



For days, Morocco has witnessed an unprecedented wave of protests, led by a non-ideological youth movement drawn from Generation Z those born between 1996 and the early 2010s. Emerging from the virtual realm into the streets, this digital-native cohort has rapidly transformed into a tangible force shaking the foundations of the Kingdom.

These young protesters, who organized behind the closed walls of platforms like Discord before spreading like wildfire across Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram, have rallied around purely social demands, targeting the country's deteriorating healthcare services and educational standards.

Despite their decentralized structure and lack of unified leadership, the protests have resonated far beyond Morocco's borders, casting a long shadow across the region. In authoritarian Arab regimes, where youth-led uprisings are often perceived as existential threats, the unrest has sparked acute anxiety particularly in Cairo, which views such movements with deep apprehension, especially when they stem from a demographic notoriously resistant to control or co-optation.

Egypt stands out among regional capitals for watching the Moroccan protests with particular trepidation, haunted by memories of the 2011 Arab Spring. The country's pro-government media has already launched a smear campaign against the protests and their aims suggesting that what's unfolding in Rabat could easily be replicated elsewhere, from Algiers to Muscat. But what exactly is fueling Cairo's unease?

Not Just a Moroccan Phenomenon

To view Morocco's Generation Z protests as an isolated event is to miss the broader picture. Rather, they represent a link in an emerging global chain of youth unrest. Early signs of this generational rebellion against traditional ideological frameworks surfaced across South Asia in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka before spreading to sub-Saharan Africa, particularly Kenya and Madagascar, and eventually arriving in North Africa via Morocco.

The phenomenon has also gained traction across Europe, with protest movements sweeping major cities from London and Paris to Berlin, Stockholm, Amsterdam, and Oslo. In the US, it has already become a defining force, with mobilizations erupting from New York and Washington to Texas, San Francisco, Chicago, and Denver.

Despite their diverse geographies and contexts, these uprisings share a common thread: they are the product of an entirely digital generation young people with little life experience but immense online savvy. They've turned the virtual world into a launchpad for expressing discontent, bypassing traditional political frameworks and rejecting both parties and governments alike.

From their online origins, these movements have spilled into the physical world with striking coordination. Demonstrations are organized with algorithmic precision and flexible networks that confound security forces through rapid mobilization and unpredictable routes. Their demands are specific and immediate, unburdened by the political posturing of previous generations.

Contrary to widespread assumptions, this marginalized generation has proven remarkably organized and politically aware. They've repurposed entertainment platforms and gaming apps as tools for political mobilization, breaking through the fear barrier in a public sphere long characterized by apathy. In doing so, they've ushered in a new era that threatens to dismantle long-standing taboos.

Morocco, as the first Arab and African country to face this new wave of protest with such intensity, now stands on the cusp of a historical transformation one that is redefining politics outside traditional institutions. This has sent ripples of concern across the region, particularly in nations that share similar socio-political foundations.

Egypt and Morocco: The Economic Parallels

What makes Morocco's protests particularly unsettling for Cairo is the striking similarity in their root causes. Both countries are grappling with deteriorating economic conditions, declining public services, youth marginalization, and chronic mismanagement of national resources.

In Morocco, the unrest has been driven by budget cuts to healthcare and education two sectors critical to youth welfare. In the 2025 national budget, only 16.4% (118 billion dirhams or \$11.5 billion) was allocated to these sectors out of a total 721 billion dirhams (\$72.1 billion).

The World Economic Forum ranks Morocco 101st globally and 9th in the Arab world in terms of education quality, while the Global Knowledge Index places the country 98th out of 141 nations. Though Morocco's GDP growth reached 3.9% in 2025 (up from 3.2% in 2024), the improvement failed to resonate with the public.

Unemployment remains a pressing concern. The High Commission for Planning reported 1.595 million unemployed Moroccans in Q2 of 2025 a rate of 12.8%. Even more alarming, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council identified 4.3 million Moroccans outside the labor force, education, or vocational training, including 1.5 million youth aged 15 to 24.

Moreover, 80% of Moroccan households expect unemployment to rise further in 2025, signaling a profound crisis of confidence in the government's ability to generate meaningful employment.

Despite these challenges, Morocco has made progress in reducing poverty, with the absolute poverty rate dropping from 15.3% in 2001 to just 1.7% in 2019, according to official data.

By contrast, Egypt presents an even grimmer picture. While the constitution mandates allocating 7% of GDP to education and healthcare (4% and 3% respectively), actual spending has fallen far short just 2.7% combined (1.5% for education, 1.2% for health).

Egypt's ranking in global education indices has steadily declined, sitting at 95th according to the World Economic Forum, with some reports placing it near the bottom globally. The Ministry of Education has officially denied these lower rankings.

Unemployment reached 6.1% in Q2 of 2025, affecting over 2 million individuals out of 33.6 million in the labor force, according to government data. Meanwhile, poverty has surged to unprecedented levels. In 2021–2022, unofficial estimates placed the poverty rate at 34%, up from 29.7% in 2020 suggesting that around 34 million Egyptians live on less than \$1 per day.

Generation Z: A New, Disruptive Political Actor

In both Morocco and Egypt, Generation Z represents a powerful demographic. In Morocco, 8.2 million people aged 15 to 29 account for roughly 25% of the population. Egypt's youth population is even larger, with 21.3 million in the same age group (nearly 20% of the total population).

What makes this group uniquely potent and dangerous, from the regime's perspective—is their deep political consciousness and rejection of traditional political structures. Disillusioned with parties and unions, they've embraced a "post-institutional" identity. They're not apathetic but seek to redefine public engagement on their own terms.

This poses a major challenge to authoritarian regimes, whose old mechanisms of control have grown obsolete. Political parties can no longer serve as intermediaries, and unions are unable to absorb rising public anger.

The result is a combustible environment: a digitally organized, self-sufficient youth movement confronting a security apparatus that relies solely on repression. In the absence of meaningful dialogue or legitimate mediation channels, the risk of social explosion becomes far more difficult to contain.

The Ghost of 2011: What Haunts Cairo?

Each time a protest erupts in an Arab or foreign capital, Cairo feels the tremors. The Egyptian regime continues to live under the long shadow of January 2011 a moment it has never truly escaped. Any protest, no matter how minor, rekindles

the haunting question: Could the impossible happen again?

The uprising in Morocco is thus viewed not as an isolated event but as a “disturbing mirror,” reflecting what might unfold in Egypt under similar conditions: unrelenting repression, political stagnation, economic hardship, and a growing rift between the state and its youth.

The core dilemma for Cairo is that Generation Z remains entirely beyond its radar. This is a generation that doesn't fear like previous ones did, that bypasses traditional media and institutions, and that communicates across borderless networks the state struggles to monitor. Disillusioned but globally connected, these youth pose a complex political puzzle for Arab regimes.

Cairo's true fear is not mass protests, but the contagious political imagination they inspire a shift in mindset that redefines the role of youth in shaping their political future.

In Conclusion...

The Generation Z uprising in Morocco is no longer a domestic affair. It has become a regional alarm bell, particularly for Egypt, which fears the spread of awareness more than the spread of protest itself. The concern is not about how large or radical the demonstrations become, but about their essence: a digital-native generation that neither seeks permission nor recognizes gatekeepers in its demand for change.

The Arab world has entered a new phase of political and social fluidity, where regimes can no longer predict where the next threat will emerge or how to contain it. These youth, raised in boundless virtual spaces, defy the constraints of geography and fear, armed with tools of mobilization that outpace state surveillance.

Morocco's protests may be just the beginning of a broader transformation one that redefines the relationship between young people and power across the Arab world.

Cairo's deepest concern isn't the crowds in Casablanca, but the growing digital consciousness incubating behind screens an invisible political force preparing for its moment. The real danger lies not in the visible marches, but in the kind of political imagination this generation is forging an imagination that no longer sees authority as sacred, nor control as inevitable.

As regimes try to suppress this new wave through defamation, denial, or brute force, it becomes clear: Generation Z is the Arab world's new political actor leaderless, ideology-free, and unwavering. They don't seek to dismantle the state, but to redefine it into something more transparent and representative.

And from Morocco, this tectonic shift might just begin compelling rulers and ruled alike to rethink politics, legitimacy, and freedom in the 21st century. The only question is whether Cairo will heed the lesson in time, or continue silencing dissent under the guise of “national security” and imaginary conspiracies that place Egypt alone at the center of a phantom global threat.

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